THE GREEN JADE HAND

HARRY STEPHEN KEELER

THE GREEN JADE HAND

HARRY STEPHEN KEELER *has also written*

THE FOURTH KING

THE AMAZING WEB

THIEVES' NIGHTS

THE SPECTACLES OF MR. CAGLIOSTRO

FIND THE CLOCK

SING SING NIGHTS

THE VOICE OF THE SEVEN SPARROWS

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THE GREEN JADE HAND

In Which a New and Quite Different Type of Detective Unravels a Mystery Staged in Chicago, Bagdad on the Lakes, London of the West!

By

HARRY STEPHEN KEELER

NEW YORK
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FIRST EDITION

TO THE FAMOUS MR. JUKES IS THIS BOOK DEDICATED IN APPRECIATION FOR THE USE OF MR. JUKES' DESCENDANT, DETECTIVE SIMON GRUNDT OF THE LINCOLN SCHOOL FOR THE FEEBLE-MINDED.

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THE GREEN JADE HAND

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH OLD AMOS CARRINGTON, MILLIONAIRE CURIO COLLECTOR, EVOLVES A BRILLIANT SCHEME!

IT WAS just past noon on a cloudy, gloomy Saturday in September, the year of our Lord 1931, that old Amos Carrington, eccentric collector of precious odds and ends from all over the world, spender of a fortune on his fad, and with a fortune yet to spend, sat in his curio room in his big residence on Chicago's Lake Shore Drive, tapping the floor nervously with his foot. It was evident that he waited for some one; several times the old man in his skullcap, with cavernous eyes rimmed in silver spectacles below it, pulled from his velvet vest a massive gold watch and glanced at its face. Presently there came a long ring at the bell; then James, his servant, appeared in the doorway of the curio room.

"Mr. Jech has arrived, sir."

"Show him in," said the old eccentric in a quavering voice.

A few seconds later a sallow-looking man of undoubted foreign extraction stepped into the room. He was clad in a shiny black suit; his shoes needed polishing; his nose was long; and his gray hair was rumpled up on his head like the quills of a porcupine. Yet about him was a pronounced air which told that, careless as he was in his personal appearance, he had a deep knowledge of some branch of art, strangely blended with business instinct. Such was the appearance of Casimer Jech, proprietor of an inconspicuous little curio store on East Twenty-second Street, and agent for a dozen of the city's foremost collectors.

Old man Carrington was the first to speak. "Sit down, Jech," he ordered in a shaking voice. "But close the door behind you first."

Jech did so and, with a cursory glance around the huge room, full of suits of armor, ancient books in their cases, bric-a-brac and strange articles from every corner of the earth and from every age of man, including a skeleton of an ancient animal that must have roamed the plains in prehistoric days, plumped down in a chair close to old Carrington.

"I'll just sit here," he said, "where the light will fall on your lips. The deafness is getting worse each year, and I'm beginning now to help it out by lip reading." He paused. "Well, I got your telephone message from your man. And what can I do for you to-day, Mr. Carrington?"

Carrington looked about him as though he feared that somewhere in the corners of the room, among the dusty relics and curios, some eavesdropper might be lurking. Then he arose, tottering, from his chair and with difficulty dragged it over close to where the curio-shop owner sat, still acceding to the other's request that the light play on his own lips. He lowered his voice into a hoarse whisper in which the wavering that characterized it was still detectable.

"Jech, how—how would you like to make a commission of—of five—five thousand dollars on a—a deal in curios?"

The curio-shop owner looked up, surprised. "Splendid commission!" he commented with a dry smile. "But what's the deal?"

"Jech," went on the quavering old voice, "I'd—I'd—I'd have carried the thing through myself if—" He held up his wrinkled hand, and his white waxy fingers trembled as though he had the ague. It was plain that his days were numbered. "But I'm too—too—old and shaky, Jech—" He stopped. "Jech, I—I can put you into a way of making five thousand dollars—but you must give me your promise —and I know that what Jech says is ironbound—that if you do not touch the deal you will not use it to your own

advantage. It—it belongs to me. It's my information. Jech —you will promise?"

"Certainly," said the curio agent, puzzled, his eyes riveted on the old man's lips, his ear turned slightly toward the source of the sound waves. "You and I, Mr. Carrington, have been in too many negotiations not to be friends, and closely allied. I've saved you thousands of dollars that you would have been mulcted of if it had been known that old Amos Carrington, the millionaire, was after them; and I admit at the same time that I've made a good few pennies myself from you. Be assured, Mr. Carrington, that whatever you say is secret between us. And if I—well, what were you going to tell me?"

Old Amos Carrington stared at the other from his silver-rimmed, blood-shot caverns, his black skullcap now tilted oddly on the side of his bald head. At last he heaved a long reluctant sigh and again began in quavering tones: "There is—is no way out of it," he said, "for I—I am too old to do it myself." He leaned forward. "Jech," what would you say if I should tell you that another 'Vindelinus de Spira' has shown up?"

A puzzled, doubting frown passed over the face of the curio specialist from East Twenty-second Street. "Of course you don't mean the 'De Devinis Institutionibus'— the one that's in the British Museum? Surely—"

"The same!" murmured the old millionaire ecstatically. "The same! Has the Greek words all written in by hand in scarlet ink, between the black-letter text. It's as genuine as genuine ever was, Jech. It has the indisputable earmarks and passes the test of the old Venetian bookmakers' products, and even has the date 1472 in the cryptogram on page ninety-one." He leaned forward. "And Jech—in the one in the British Museum the Nepithomon is missing. And in this copy which has shown up, the whole Nepithomon is present. Jech—what is it worth?"

The curio specialist shook his tousled gray head gravely. "Worth a tremendous piece of money. Where is this Vindelinus? If you've proved its genuineness by the tests, then you've already seen it. And what's the price on it? Are you sure that it's a Venetian product and not spurious?"

Carrington raised his waxy hand. "Jech, was ever in all these years old man Carrington hoodwinked on a spurious antique? Has old man Carrington's life been spent in vain that he does not know the genuine from the imitation?"

Jech shook his head admiringly. "No; you're a fox, all right, Mr. Carrington. I pride myself that I'm pretty keen in the field, but you're far better than I am."

There was a long pause. At last the old man in the skullcap spoke again: "Jech, I—I tremble at speaking of this. But I—I have your promise—and I know you to be a man of your word. While you will have me by the throat—I—I shall have you the same way. So—so—here goes: Jech, have you received the usual circular concerning the book auction Monday morning at nine at Snodgrass' auction rooms on Wabash Avenue?"

Jech wrinkled up his face. "Yes; I got the circular. I'm on their mailing list. Bunch of stuff from an old library up in Evanston to go under the hammer. I meant to run down early Monday, glance over the titles, and if there was anything worth while I might—" He stopped suddenly and a slight gasp escaped him. "You—you don't mean that the Vindelinus is among that Hoggenheimer collection?"

Old man Carrington cackled shrilly. "It is!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "It is, Jech! And the poor fools don't yet know that there's a book in that collection worth twenty times more than they'll get for the whole shebang. It's there, Jech. It's got the break in the type on page seventy-eight, the eleven-color monogram, and the pin spots in the leather. It's the second-known Vindelinus on earth with that title, Jech. And Snodgrass & Co., auctioneers of furniture, crockery, rugs, and such commercial trash, don't even guess

what's lying in their shelves waiting for Monday. I handled that book with my old palsied hands that shook so badly when I discovered the truth that I could hardly hold the volume. The ignoramus who originally owned it, when he found no title on it, wrote one across the leather binding in ink."

Old Carrington cackled shrilly again. "The poor fool wrote: 'The Book of Genesis.' Must have seen the word 'Gentes' inside. And I discovered the truth only by glancing inside by accident. It has No. 122 pasted on it. That and no more. Jech, do you see what our next move is?"

The curio dealer, tense in his chair, was frankly puzzled. "No; I don't. How soon will it be discovered, do you suppose, that another Vindelinus has shown up? These people don't know anything about books, but some shark looking over the volumes may accidentally stumble on the fact. So it's listed simply as 'The Book of Genesis'? That's rich! There's thousands of old copies of Genesis in existence. Every monk in the Middle Ages turned one out before he died."

Old man Carrington leaned forward. "Jech, I—I would have walked out of there with that precious book under my coat, but it—it could not be done. It could not be done. My —my old hands shook too much. And there were too many clerks scurrying around. I—I handed it back to be placed on the long shelf back of the counter, and I asked the chief clerk if any advance purchases could be made. He—he frigidly informed me that nothing could go except at auction, on account of the legal status of the Hoggenheimer estate."

"And then?"

"And then I left, Jech, realizing that all these years there has reposed in that ignorant ex-brewer's library what to the owner was just an old book he had picked up in his European travels some place, but which is now a brother to one of the most famous books in the world, the Vindelinus

de Spira. And so I sent for you, Jech, for you are only about forty-nine or fifty years old—so you are young and cool and steady. Jech—"

"Yes. Go on."

"Jech, you must do what I couldn't do. You must get that Vindelinus. And for that book I shall pay you the splendid sum of five thousand dollars cash."

Jech leaned forward, an avaricious gleam in his old fish-like business eyes. And at the same time they radiated a strange sort of admiration. "What do you suggest?" he asked with a forced calmness.

Old man Carrington smiled and laughed delightedly, childishly. "Jech, any one is allowed to consult the table of titles and to ask for any of the books to examine it; to take it over to the window if need be. And before to-day is over some bibliophile who really has studied the game is going to try to pick up a cheap Middle Age copy of 'Genesis,' and ten seconds later will announce to the world the great news that another Vindelinus de Spira has been found. And then —good night! They'll—they'll realize fifty thousand dollars for it. Any museum in this country, if not the British Museum itself, will pay that sum.

"So what we do must be done quickly. And that—that is up to you. Jech, you must leave here and go straight to Snodgrass' auction rooms. You—you must casually ask to see Book No. 122. You must carefully note its size, color, binding, and weight. You—you must go back to your shop, get a book—an old volume exactly like it in appearance. You must paste on it a sticker marked No. 122, and write in ink on its cover what is written on the original volume 122. Then you must return a second time to Snodgrass' with that book under your coat.

"You are young and steady, Jech. You must ask in turn for several of the volumes again, and hand them each back after examining them. You must then get No. 122, from

a different clerk this time if possible, and take it over to the window or any place out of the line of view. You—you must change the books and hand them back the volume you have brought. You must get out of there in a hurry, lock that precious Vindelinus in your safe, and send me a special delivery telling me that everything—everything is completed. As soon as the auction is over, and everything is calm—say by Monday noon—I will hand you five thousand in cash, and you will turn the Vindelinus over to me. Jech, is—is my offer fair?"

The curio agent sat for a long time reflecting. A shred of greediness in him made him opposed to stealing a book worth fifty thousand dollars and selling it for five thousand. Yet his common sense at the same time told him that his bread was buttered on the same side as that of the old millionaire, for if he, Jech, proved recalcitrant or unfaithful to his trust, old Carrington could easily cheat him out of the volume by proclaiming the truth to the world. And Jech knew that in the eccentric old man lurked a fighting, revengeful devil.

Only for a few more seconds did he reflect before he realized that both he and Carrington were in for a good profit. He looked up and smiled sourly. "Suits me," he returned. "I can do it. And I need that money—all the money I can get in the world. I've set my mark for a hundred thousand before I quit and retire. 'Nough said.

"Then if I'm to put this deal through," he went on, "I'd better be on the job. This book might not be discovered at all—and on the other hand it might be discovered any minute." He rose abruptly. "No. 122, is it?"

Old man Carrington also rose, supporting his tottering aged frame by his chair. His voice was now more cracked and quavering than ever with eagerness. "I—I knew you would not fail me, Jech," he declared. "Oh—if you only knew how I want that Vindelinus. It's a gem. It's a gem, Jech.

Let me know by special delivery the minute you've turned the trick. I'll pay you the five thousand for it the minute the auction is over—and nothing develops."

"Good enough, then!" said Jech. "I'll get it out of there. Leave it to me. I'll be off on the job now. Time is precious."

He bowed himself out to the door and was escorted to the outer hallway by the servant who appeared when he stepped from the curio room.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH CASIMER JECH, CURIO DEALER, TRIES HIS HAND AT A $5,000 COUP

OUTSIDE the house, Jech made his way to the nearest street-car line and took a car at once for Wabash Avenue. Here, under the shadow of the roaring, shrieking elevated trains, he entered Snodgrass' auction rooms, full of furniture, semi-antiques, Persian rugs, and jewelry from a municipal pawn institution, all carefully laid out in a glass show case.

Jech went straight to the back of the store, however, where a thousand or more tattered and ancient-looking books were on exhibit on three long shelves, each bearing a numbered paper sticker which was exposed to the view of any one standing down below. He consulted an index, carefully made out in beautiful Spencerian handwriting; then, surveying first several of the books, and secondly the blond, vacuous-looking clerk behind the counter, he asked for No. 676.

This proved to be an old volume of Latin prose, but Jech, familiar with books, knew that its marketable value was but eight or nine dollars. He returned it and casually asked for No. 844. This, in turn, after his examination proved to be an old English book of which many copies were in existence, and of which the market value was less than five dollars. All in all, Jech could see plainly that the Hoggenheimer collection was the garnerings of an ignorant collector who bought only what seemed old and antique, and who had no real knowledge whatever of books.

At length Jech asked for No. 122, and when it was handed down to him, it was all he could do to repress a gasp. Indeed, as he turned each page over casually, he

could see that beyond all doubt it was the far-famed "De Devinis," written by one who, in the lore of incunabula or rare books, bore the weighty title of Lucius Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius, and published and bound by Wendelin of Speier in 1472. Connoisseur that he was, and knowing well the tests of all the great curios of the world, he turned to certain pages and studied the reading matter carefully, particularly the type and illuminated initial letters.

It was indeed exactly as the tests prescribed. It was another original Vindelinus. With a parting look to see that the Nepithomon was present in this copy—a factor which must assuredly make it even more valuable than the copy in the British Museum—he returned it with a yawn and walked out of the auction rooms.

Once outside, he took an L train to East Twenty-second Street and hastening down the iron stairs crossed the street diagonally, which brought him to a short flight of steps leading into a basement shop. The shop itself bore no name, no mark which might identify its proprietor, save a flapping wooden sign in front bearing the word "Curios" and the number "14" in faded gold letters. Yet that same shop was known perhaps to every collector and would-be collector in Chicago and the East.

Jech went down the flight of steps and, with a glance at his big show window full of miscellaneous dusty articles, unlocked the door. The front of the shop contained the stock itself; at the rear, through the open door of a cheap partition, an office fitted with a desk and massive old-fashioned safe was visible. As in all stores, this rear section was perhaps a foot and a half higher than the store part, and access to it was reached by a single well-worn wooden step. Jech, however, did not traverse this step or this doorway, but in the front part, among relics of the past and curios of the present—old stones, old weapons, old instruments, old paintings, old cabinets, old pieces of armor, old manuscripts—

he fumbled through a long shelf of old books, each with its leather cover worn and faded.

Weighing each one in his hand and studying the size and color of its leather, he at last came to one which was an exact replica of the Vindelinus de Spira. An inspection of its title page showed that it was a copy of "De Romanis" by the Monk Manaccia. Going to a near-by drawer, Jech withdrew a paper sticker with glue on the back and a white unmarked face, and with a pen carefully made the numeral 122 on the face of it. This he stuck on the back of the "De Romanis." In turn he printed across the leather face, using his keen memory in lieu of a model: "The Book of Genesis."

"It'll cost old man Carrington not five thousand dollars, but five thousand one hundred dollars now that I've got to lose this one-hundred-dollar 'De Romanis' to get the Vindelinus," Jech commented ruefully to himself. "He'll pay it, though."

As soon as the ink had dried, he thrust the book under his vest, which he buttoned carefully. Then, noting that a slight drizzle was beginning to fall from the gray skies outside, he seized an umbrella which, strange to say, was not protection for the old shiny black suit, but was in reality an excuse for hugging his arm close to his side and concealing the bulge in his chest. Then he locked up the shop and went straight back to Wabash Avenue and Snodgrass' auction rooms.

When he entered for the second time he found to his slight chagrin that the same blond clerk was on duty back of the special bookshelves, and somewhat reluctantly he strode up to the man. His heart was beating a little wildly now. He was rattled. Jech, the cool, the collected, the hard, was nervous.

"I—I beg your pardon," he stammered, "but—but that No. 676 rather interested me. May I have another look at it?"

The blond, vacuous-looking clerk took it down and handed it to him.

Jech glanced idly over its contents. Then he looked up. "Are there any prices set on these so that they could be bought ahead of the auction?" he asked hopefully.

"No, sir," replied the clerk. "This is part of the Hoggenheimer estate and has to be auctioned by law."

"I see." Jech handed the volume back. "I'll be in at nine o'clock Monday morning, then." He half turned. Then he paused. "And—let me have another look at No. 122."

No. 122 came down from the shelf and was handed to him. He thumbed it again, his heart beating wildly. It had all seemed so easy when discussing it, but now Jech was demoralized. Pictures of a commotion, of running clerks, of being seized, of being searched, passed through his uneasy mind, as well as visions of glaring newspaper headlines that one, Jech, the well-known curio-store owner of East Twenty-second Street, had been found to be a common thief. But on top of this the picture of a five-thousand-dollar bill riveted itself on his brain, and he glanced hastily at the clerk.

"I would like to take this over to the daylight," he said laconically. And without further ado he marched over to the window at the edge of the store, where, luckily, not a clerk was in view. It was but the work of a tremulous moment, during which he hugged the umbrella tight to him, to get the doctored "De Romanis" from under his vest and slip the Vindelinus back there.

With trembling fingers he fastened one or two of the buttons of his vest wholly out of their particular order, and with the "De Romanis" in his hand he strolled back to the clerk. "Very interesting," he said with an artificial yawn and wondered dully if his heart had really stopped beating forever.

The blond clerk took the book from his fingers and replaced it on the shelf, giving only a passing glance at the paper wafer with the number. Whereupon Jech strolled

out to the street, and there his breath escaped him in a shrill exhaust and beads of cold perspiration sprung to his forehead like dew.

"My God!" he ejaculated. "That was some horrible experience!" A distorted laugh rose from him. "But we got away with it."

Twenty minutes later he was in his store, thumbing exultantly over the faded yellow pages. A minute later he had passed, by way of the single wooden step, into the rear room that was fitted up as an office, and closing the wooden matchboard door that gave a view, or partial view, of his operations from the street, he squatted down in front of his ancient massive lock-and-key safe that served as a repository for his more valuable curios. Opening his vest and withdrawing from a gap between two buttons of his shirt a ponderous key that hung inside his clothing by a long leather thong around his neck, he unlocked the strong box and placed the precious book in one of a case of loose wooden drawers that stood at the back of the iron cubicle. Within four seconds the safe door was locked tightly and securely on it, and he was standing erect again, buttoning his shirt and vest.

Now he sat down at his desk and wrote out a brief note, to the envelope of which he affixed a special-delivery stamp. The contents ran:

> Mr. Carrington: I have succeeded in getting what we discussed by the method outlined. Will await your visit here. Or shall I bring it to your Lake Shore Drive residence? Casimer Jech.

After sealing his note, he took it to the mail box at the corner of State and Twenty-second Streets and dropped it in. For the balance of the afternoon he puttered around the store, dusting things off, waiting on a few customers, at times stopping in his work to grin with satisfaction, and once to ruminate to himself: "Funny old codger, Carrington. Ever since he got an electric shock on a short-circuited phone, he refuses to use it. He doesn't know it,

but he's a bigger curio than anything he's got in his tremendous collection."

Then Jech resumed his work, picturing a pile of bills amounting to five thousand dollars to add to those already to his credit in the First National Bank.

Toward dusk he began to frown. "I ought to have gone over to his place," he reflected. "I'm anxious to hear what he's got to say about the stunt. I'll ring his man and ask him to tell the old boy I'm on my way over."

Stepping to his phone he dropped in a nickel and dialed it for Lake Drive 4000. And when he heard the voice of James on the wire he quickly stated his message for the old millionaire who was afraid of the telephone. But to his consternation James came back at him with some surprising news.

"I'm very sorry, sir," the man said, "but Mr. Carrington had an apoplectic stroke an hour and a half ago. The doctors say he will recover, but it will be a week before he can even sit up in bed or see a visitor. Anything else you would like to know, sir?"

Jech stared dumbly at the transmitter. "A stroke," he ejaculated. "Apoplexy!" A long whistle escaped him. "James," he asked suddenly, "did—did he receive my special-delivery letter this afternoon? This is Jech speaking."

"Your special? Why—yes. Yes, Mr. Jech. I took it in at the front door myself. He read it and seemed very pleased. He locked it in his vault and went to examining his curios again. And at four-thirty he was struck down by the apoplexy. Anything else you wish to know, sir?"

"No; I guess not," Jech replied with a sigh. Then he hung up and stood at the phone, staring blankly at the opposite wall of his store.

"If old Amos Carrington should die," he said to himself slowly, "I'm in just about fifty thousand dollars and nobody on earth much wiser. But he's alive, and as long as he

is, he's got me by the ear, especially since he's read my letter admitting that I got away with the stunt." He shook his head regretfully. "Well—no matter! Five thousand dollars is five thousand—and there's my word to him. And Casimer Jech is an honorable man!"

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH HORATIO SILVERTHORNE, BIBLIOPHILE, MAKES A BEWILDERING DISCOVERY

EARLY on a Monday morning, as the elevated trains carrying rafts of Loop workers were thundering overhead, and the sidewalks below were full of scurrying clerks and shopgirls, Horatio Silverthorne, a rabid collector of old books, stopped his car in front of Snodgrass' auction rooms.

It was just eight o'clock, opening time. Inside, clerks were taking off blue-denim covers from bric-a-brac and uncovering other pieces of stock for that day's business. Silverthorne, carrying his cane jauntily and surveying in a near-by Venetian mirror his silver-gray, close-cropped hair and keen eyes framed in their gold-rimmed eyeglasses, strode straight over to the counter which protected the Hoggenheimer collection of books.

There he paused a moment and then casually asked to be allowed to see No. 998, the title and number label of which were both quite visible from his place on the outside of the counter. By degrees he had book after book shown to him, and at last, with an odd enigmatical look in his eyes, he asked for No. 122.

"Really," he said with a smile, in explanation to the clerk, "I'm afraid I'm troubling you, but I didn't quite get my fill Saturday morning. Some of these titles are more than interesting to me."

"It's no trouble at all," said the blond fellow back of the counter. And he handed down No. 122.

With a sigh that resembled that of the connoisseur in wines about to sip some rare vintage, Silverthorne opened the brown-leather covers of No. 122. His face became

blank, and he quickly turned to the title page. What he saw there caused him to snap the book shut and turn it immediately over, to where the number sticker was pasted. It was No. 122, all right. He opened it again, and once more found himself staring at the "De Romanis of Manaccia" on the hand-lettered title-page.

He looked up quickly. "Have these volume numbers been changed since I was in here Saturday morning?" he asked sharply.

"No, sir. Nothing has been changed, sir."

Silverthorne, his gold-rimmed eyeglasses perched on the end of his nose, his hands tightly clutching his ornate cane, turned slowly to an apoplectic red. Nothing came from his lips, for he was quite calm, but inside of him exploded five mighty words: "Stolen—the Vindelinus is stolen!"

He passed a hand over his brow. Again he stared at the title-page with its words "De Romanis" and a bitter smile filtered over his keen features. He handed the book back, and weakly leaned up against the counter. "Have—have there been any other collectors interested—interested in—this collection?" he inquired faintly.

"Only two or three, sir. Saturday came a man who was so interested that he came back later that afternoon, sir."

"What sort of a man?" Silverthorne shot back tensely.

"A man in a shiny black suit with gray hair that stuck up on his head in all directions and—and a long nose." The clerk stared at Silverthorne, who could feel an apoplectic red mounting in tremendous waves to his face. "Nothing is wrong, is there?"

"No; nothing," returned Silverthorne with a forced smile.

As casually as possible he strode from the auction room and outside he stood on the sidewalk, allowing the cool morning air to play over his fevered brow. Slowly the stupefying realization was seeping into his soul that on Saturday morning he had been in the position of a man in

whose hands dangled the greatest prize that a bibliophile could ever desire—a genuine duplicate of the "De Devinis" —The "Vindelinus de Spira" of which but one copy had thus far been known to exist. And now!

"Jech, the crafty devil!" he exclaimed softly to himself. "For it was Jech, of course. That's his description to a T. And the 'De Romanis'—well that proves it conclusively."

Silverthorne jumped furiously into his car and jamming on his clutch lever shot forward with such a speed that he almost ran down an old man who was crossing Wabash Avenue. Inside of sixty seconds he was over on Michigan Boulevard, bowling along in the bright morning sunshine at a rate so terrific that the traffic policemen turned one after another and stared at him. And the set angry smile of defeat on his face caused more than one pedestrian to wonder who the dignified man in the tonneau was.

Inside of a quarter of an hour he was alighting in front of a basement curio store on East Twenty-second Street—a store which had only a flapping sign out in front bearing the word "Curios" and the street number as distinguishing characteristics. From the sidewalk two copious windows full of quaint treasures from the four corners of the earth looked forth upon the passers-by; but farther inside a semidarkness cut off the interior from the street.

Silverthorne, however, lost no time in staring to the right or left, but strode down the short flight of steps and presently was on the inside of the place—an inside that presented a jumbled picture of all the scenes depicted in the world-famous tales of the "Arabian Nights." A man, with bushy, tangled gray hair, a long nose, and a worn alpaca office coat, came forward from a tiny office at the back, snapping on an overhanging cluster of incandescents. When he saw his visitor, a smile of recognition and welcome came to his face.

"Mr. Silverthorne!" he exclaimed. "And what can I do for you to-day?" He riveted his eyes upon the other's lips, well illuminated by the electric light overhead.

Silverthorne motioned to the tiny flight of steps which led upstairs to Jech's living apartment; an apartment in which he had often sat while discussing various rare books. "Like to talk to you upstairs," he said curtly. And the tone of his voice and the bitter curve to his lips made the curio-shop owner glance oddly toward him.

Jech, however, with a nod of acquiescence led the way upstairs to a tiny parlor, off of which was a bedroom, a bath, and a kitchenette. There he motioned Silverthorne to a chair. "Just sit down there, Mr. Silverthorne, where the light from the window will play on your lips. My deafness is getting worse each month. What can I do for you?" he asked again. "We can be quite private here—and the bell will ring if a customer comes in downstairs." He paused expectantly.

Silverthorne leaned forward in his chair. His voice was hard. "Jech, I want to buy that Vindelinus you lifted from Snodgrass' dump some time on Saturday. You beat me to it. What's your price?"

Jech appeared startled. " 'Vindelinus'—'Snodgrass'—my price?" he repeated wonderingly. "I don't—don't quite understand, Mr. Silverthorne. Surely you don't refer to the 'De Devinis'—that famous volume in the British Museum?" He looked more closely at his visitor. "Are you quite well, Mr. Silverthorne?"

"Never better in my life," snapped the bibliophile bitterly. "Jech, come out of it! Quit your trying to stall me! I'm here for business now. I discovered that 'Vindelinus' solely by accident on Saturday morning—they handed me down No. 122 when I asked for No. 132. Punk collection—put together by an ignorant ignoramus. And I've been hoping—praying—hoping—that—" He stopped. "Well, you beat me to it, Jech. What's your price?"

Jech's face was comical to say the least. He put his hands on his forehead and shook his head dumbly. "I—I don't get you, Mr. Silverthorne. You're talking Greek to me. I don't get you at all. What—what's it all about?"

Silverthorne heaved a sigh of impatience. He cleared his throat and adjusted his eyeglasses, through which he glared balefully at the man across from him. "Jech," he said, "you got me some darned good specimens for my collection in past years. We've both profited by it vastly. And you were the one who called me down here last week to offer me a copy of the "De Romanis" by the Monk Manaccia. I know blamed well, too, that there isn't another in Chicago except the one copy I already had in my own collection. You had the only other one here in this town. And, Jech, that doctored-up "De Romanis" is sitting in Snodgrass' auction rooms with the label 122 on it, and the Vindelinus de Spira that formerly bore that label is gone. Jech, I've got your number. Now what are you going to say?"

The proprietor of the curio store stroked his chin with his fingers. It was plain that what had just been told him had rattled him. After a moment he said: "Mr. Silverthorne, begging your pardon, but there are several dozen copies of the 'De Romanis' known to have been printed. Why accuse me of—"

Silverthorne snapped him off. Pulling from his pocket a leather wallet he withdrew a hundred-dollar bill which he held forth to the other. " 'Nough said!" he declared. "You offered it to me for a hundred. Here's your price. Now deliver the book."

Jech's face wore a pained expression. "I—I—I sold it," he stammered, "a—a day before yesterday to—to a well-known collector who was looking for a copy."

"The name of the collector?" asked Silverthorne like a lawyer on a witness stand. He took from his pocket a notebook and pencil. "The name and address, please?"

Jech spluttered. He rose majestically from his chair and paced up and down the room. "Doesn't matter what the name is," he snapped. "I'm—I'm not on the witness stand. I refuse to tell what his name is. I refuse. I—"

He was broken off by Silverthorne's derisive laugh.

"Enough, Jech. It's funny. Now, what's your price for that book? You beat me to it and that's all that counts now."

Jech cooled down a bit. He dropped into his chair. "You say," he began feebly, "that it is a real Vindelinus de Spira, a copy of the 'De Devinis Institutionibus Adver—' "

"Yes, yes," Silverthorne put in, as though not relishing such a farce. "What price?"

"If—if I could get such a book ever—say this Vindelinus —what price would you pay for it?" Jech parried.

"I'm not a rich man any more," said Silverthorne regretfully, "considering that I've devoted myself to an art that's been an expensive hobby. I've blown my pile, Jech. And I've only myself to blame. I'm down to the actual house I live in now, plus a small annuity from my father's estate that takes care of myself and daughter." He paused. "You stole that Vindelinus to sell somewhere—and I'll make you the first offer for it. It's my best and last offer: All I've got —one thousand dollars cash!"

"I am not asking you what you offer me," said Jech curtly, "for what I have not. I have asked you what is the most you would offer me if ever such a thing—say—came into my hands."

"Very well," replied Silverthorne, as a man speaking to a child. "And I will answer you: One thousand dollars cash."

Jech smiled broadly. "One thousand dollars cash for something that is worth fifty times that to a museum or to a wealthy book collector. Isn't that rather small—"

"Isn't it rather generous for a book that I definitely know is stolen?" snapped Silverthorne. "And furthermore stolen from me, considering that I made a prior discovery of it. Suppose we quit arguing and come to terms. I tell you I'm not a rich man any more. A thousand cash will clean out my bank account and leave me only my annuity. But I offer that thousand. And it's cash."

Jech yawned. "Mr. Silverthorne, I'll have to ask you to

excuse me until such a time as you can come to me and talk to me as man to man. You're in a frame of mind today where you're convinced somehow that I have this Vindelinus, which of course I haven't. I can't assure you any more than that: that I haven't the thing, never saw it, and never expect to see it as long as I live, unless I take another trip to England." He rose. "That's final. I know nothing of what you are speaking about and will have to ask you to excuse me. Are you interested in any other books? I have—"

Silverthorne rose. His countenance was black. "Not interested," he said sullenly. "Not interested at all." He turned toward the doorway. "Sorry I troubled you, Jech. It seems we can't get together. I ought to have expected a tumble in the beautiful castle I had built. All right. Good day."

"Take the stairway down," advised Jech courteously.

Silverthorne strode down the stairway, picked his way through the store with a backward glance at the old patched-up safe standing in the rear office, and went out to the sidewalk. There he cranked up his machine and got inside. He drove slowly to Michigan Avenue and there turned south.

"He has it, of course," he muttered to himself, gripping the steering wheel fiercely in his irritation. "But, on the other hand, if I spill the information and let the world know that a genuine 'De Devinis,' made by old Wendelin of Speier, has shown up, I'll lose it, too, as well as Jech. And then it'll never crown my collection." He shook his head. "No; the big question is: How can I get it away from that thief? There must be some way to separate him from it, and he can't let a peep out of him if the method is successful." He nodded. "Yes; it's worth a lot of thought —a lot of thought!"

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH LUKE MC CRACKEN, CRACKSMAN, HAS AN ADVENTURE ON THE ELECTRIC RAILROAD TO CHICAGO

ABOUT noontime on Tuesday, Luke McCracken, sitting in his cell in the big, white-stone penitentiary at Joliet, Illinois, felt a most peculiar combination of thrills and exaltation surging back and forth through him.

At every step of the guard outside he went to the cell door and peered out, his heart beating wildly. For three years and nine months, barring Sundays and holidays, he had been seated in the prison dining room at this time, after a hard morning's work in the machine shop; but to-day he had been presented with a neat but cheap blue-serge suit and cap, and had not even been removed from his cell. The reason, however, was a simple one; for to-day was the day that Luke McCracken was to go back to the world of sunlight and people and green trees and grass.

At last the suspense broke, for a turnkey with clanking keys on his wrist came to the door and swung it open. "Follow me, No. 2,246," he ordered. And McCracken, his big bony hands thrust into his pockets, his new cap under his arm, strode after him, breathing in anticipation long breaths of freedom.

Upstairs, through stone passages and stairways cut off at intervals by doors heavily barred, the turnkey led the way. Presently McCracken found himself blinking in the bright light of the warden's office, fitted up with mahogany furniture, its floor covered with soft green carpet on which the convict luxuriously slid his foot back and forth.

Only the warden was present, together with a young clerk who, strange for prison methods, was hired from outside the walls instead of being taken from the trusties.

Neither the warden's face nor his words were unkind as he motioned to the turnkey to leave and spoke to the convict. "Sit down, McCracken," he said.

McCracken dropped uncomfortably into a straight chair.

The warden surveyed the stocky figure with the bullet-shaped head on which, by the kindness of the prison authorities, the hair had been allowed to grow longer in the last two months; the defiant eyes, the fighting jaw. At last he spoke again:

"Well, McCracken, I'm a little late in getting around to you. To-day marks the time when your term ends. I suppose you're glad?"

"More'n that, warden," commented McCracken curtly. "I've had enough."

"But I wonder if you have?" said the gray-haired man at the desk, leaning forward. "I really wonder if you have, Luke, or will you get back here in time again?"

McCracken raised his right hand fervently; his lips broke into a grin showing two rows of irregular teeth. "So help me, warden, I'm off this here life f'r good! You'll never see me here again, le' me tell you that."

"I sincerely hope so," said the other firmly. He paused. "And what are your plans, McCracken? You are not compelled to tell them, of course, for—" He glanced up at the clock on the wall. "Your time expired technically shortly before noon. You may consider yourself at liberty now, if you wish."

"There's no objection to my tellin' my plans," replied McCracken, toeing the soft velvet carpet with his prison-made shoe. "But, first, warden, how much I got comin' on the extra nights' work in th' machine shop? I've figgered it an' want to know whether my tally stands with yourn."

"Certainly." The warden consulted a heavy book with many ink entries. Then he opened a tin box in his desk and fumbling in it brought forth a number of bills which he

counted out in front of him. "The account stands, Luke, three hundred and twelve dollars and sixty-six cents. That's the amount you've made by overtime voluntary work in prison. We've been short of machinists, and you've come in right handy. And the ten dollars which every departing guest takes with him as a present from the State makes three hundred and twenty-two dollars and sixty-six cents. Does that tally with your records?"

The ex-prisoner nodded. "Just a little better, warden; just a little better. I guess I slipped up on my figgers a bit." He fidgeted in his chair. "But you was askin' me, warden, 'bout my plans. My plans is dependin' directly on them there three hundred an' twelve 'xtra dollars. It's this way, warden: I've had enough o' this. Ain't no use of my tellin' you that I was jobbed into this dump; we'll let it go.

"But I been followin' th' ads in th' papers the last month 'r so," McCracken went on, "an' I been in touch with a cigar-store owner down in Chicago what wants to sell his little shop an' stock. Wants three hundred dollars f'r th' good will an' stock an' business location an' guarantees seventy-five dollars a month an' a livin' room from the thing f'r all time. So I'm goin' to be a small tradesman, warden. So fur's I c'n see, I got to settle down and stay right in the eyes o' the bulls where they can't job me again. An' the only place I'm safe is to sit right in my own store day an' night where the cops can see me an' know I'm off th' game."

"I see." The old man smiled. "Luke, you say you were jobbed. Tell me about it. Your record was bad—but it isn't the first time that a man has been sent into this place by a miscarriage of justice. What happened?"

The ex-prisoner gave a short hard laugh, a bitter laugh. "You bet your life, warden, I was jobbed! All on account o' a woman, too. I admit, warden, that my record wasn't good. I grew up with the old Illinois Street gang in Chicago—and some o' the older lads taught me how to peter

a strong box. That's where I learned th' tricks o' the trade. Enough for that, though. Because I happened to know how to kick in a gopher an' do it right is no reason that—Well, never mind.

"You was askin' me how I got jobbed," McCracken continued. "As I says, warden, a woman. The purty-lookin' she-devil I married. An' I began pallin' with one Slim Jim Landers. He was a handsome chap, warden, and knew more about crackin' a box than little Luke McCracken ever knew or will know. The woman fell in love with him. I could see it in her eyes when she looked at him. I was just figgerin' on breakin' with him, when the Hempstead burglary takes place up in Chi. I got no love in my mind f'r that guy, even if he is dead, an' I says once more what I says at the time of my trial: it was Slim Jim Landers what pulled that job, for he come down on the place that night to see the woman and left his kit o' tools with her. They musta made some arrangement to ditch me and meet afterward, f'r next mornin' she was standin' over me with two bulls an' I was pinched."

"And what about the kit of tools and nitroglycerin that was 'stashed' in your bottom bureau drawer, Luke?" put in the warden, showing for the first time that he had a better knowledge of that old conviction than he had pretended.

"Before God, warden, I'm tellin' you that that kit o' tools and soup belonged to Landers, who musta left it with the woman. Instead of stashin' it for him, she slipped it in my bureau drawer and called th' police next mornin', sayin' that I was out all night. An' it was durin' that same night that the Hempstead safe was blown; so I was jugged—jugged for a five-year stretch, warden."

"Hm!" the warden exclaimed. There was a tense silence during which the ex-cracksman bit his lips and looked as though a thousand savage devils were tearing in his chest.

"Couldn't you disprove her statement, Luke? And what became of her?" the warden asked after a moment.

McCracken shook his head lugubriously. "I nearly disproved it, warden, but missed by a hair. I've a young friend, a fellow that was just a kiddo when I was a boy in the Illinois Street gang. I met him that night on the Clark Street Bridge an' we stood for several hours gassin' about the old days when he and me both lived on Illinois Street. He's a clean, white chap, warden, a fellow that couldn't never have been dragged into that Illinois Street gang stuff never; a fellow what's got both education an'—an' a character.

"So, as I says," McCracken went on, "we stood an' gassed until half past twelve by his watch, right on the Clark Street Bridge. The Hempstead safe was blown at one-ten 'way out near the South Shore Country Club. If the woman hadn't perjured herself about my not bein' home all night—for I went straight home, you see, after I left this young fellow and was in bed a few minutes after the safe was blown—an' if she hadn't shoved Landers' kit o' tools on me while I was sleepin', I'd a got clear on my alibi, for this young fellow testified in court that we parted at twelve-thirty by his watch. And nobody could get from the Chicago River to South Chicago an' blow a safe in forty minutes. Why, warden, it takes more'n that just to get from one o' them points to th' other. An' that ain't allowin' no time to place th' soup an' all that monkey-business that goes with crackin' a crib. But th' jury passed up my witness' testimony on the theory that his watch wasn't right, even though he swore he'd never altered it in a month, an' a jew'ler testified that it was correct to a hair.

"So on th' strength o' the lyin' words o' that she-devil of a woman," McCracken continued, "they give me five year in here. You was askin' me what became o' her. She blew after I was sent up, and I suppose she hung out with

Landers as long as he was alive. But I guess we've both read in the newspapers, warden, that Slim Jim Landers was killed in a booze hi-jackin' job in Detroit nearly two years ago."

The warden reflected with his chin in his hands. "Well, Luke, if your story is correct—and I'll admit it rings true—try not to get into such a mix-up again. It doesn't pay. Stay straight—play straight—and remember that society will give you a square deal; that your fellow mortal will do what's right with you always if you're on the level. Remember that. You're free." He looked over the man in his cheaply made blue-serge suit and glanced at the cap. "You can go, Luke. Here's your paper of discharge." He lifted the money. "And here's your three hundred and twenty-two dollars and sixty-six cents."

The ex-cracksman stepped forward and separated the money with trembling fingers into two piles, one containing three hundred and twelve dollars and sixty-six cents, the other a lone ten-dollar bill. The big pile he rolled up and placed in an old empty tobacco sack in his coat pocket. The ten he slipped into his trousers pocket.

Then he smiled a weary, bitter smile. "It'll seem good, warden, to be in the world again, ownin' a little business o' my own, and not havin' to take nothin' from nobody. These three years an' nine months was hell—considerin' that I didn't earn 'em." He turned toward the door. "I can go, can I?"

The warden nodded. "Go right ahead. Show your paper at the inner and outer gate. They have been notified to let you out." And he shook a warning forefinger. "Good luck to you, my man! Remember the world will treat you square if you play on the level."

With his bullet-shaped head erect the ex-cracksman strode down the flight of steps to the door which led into the prison yard. There the turnkey, consulting a book and glancing at the paper, passed him out to the long gravel

road that ran to the huge main gate at the prison wall. At the wall gate he again displayed his paper and again, after consulting a book, the armed guard passed him through with a cheery "good luck."

Once outside McCracken strolled blissfully, breathing in great lungfuls of the fresh air, stretching himself in the sunshine, luxuriously reveling in the strange sensation of freedom. The bitterness that had filled his heart a few minutes before was partly gone now, and he pictured himself owning a little cigar store in Chicago, master of his own business, of his own destiny.

A short walk brought him up to the town of Joliet, and there, after a brief inquiry as to the steam road and the electric line fares to Chicago, he bought a one-way ticket on the electric, which proved to be the cheaper. After a meal in the station restaurant and a wait of another half hour, he was on a huge electric coach purring along over hot dry fields toward the big metropolis of the West.

Once, during the afternoon, he pulled from his pocket his precious tobacco sack with the three hundred and twelve dollars and sixty-six cents in it, and fondling it lovingly took one peep into its interior. Then he jammed it down into his trousers pocket once more. But he failed to see a weazel-faced fellow across the aisle scratch his chin and wrinkle up his forehead.

The afternoon dragged on interminably. It was hot. McCracken, tired from a number of nervous awakenings the night before, fell back into his comfortable seat and presently he was snoring. At once the weazel-faced fellow across the aisle, with a muttered imprecation at the hot sunshine, changed his seat, dropping down into the one beside McCracken who was quite in the land of dreams by now.

A second later the weazel-faced man, concealed in his operations because of the few passengers scattered in the car, and because of the high backs of the seats, insinuated

two long fingers gently into his companion's side-trouser pocket and shortly after got up in a hurry and went into the washroom.

Inside the washroom, his fingers held a tobacco sack. A grin spread over his features as he tumbled its contents out into the palm of his hand. Within a second he had transferred them to his pocket and was consulting a tiny time-table. The table showed the next stop to be Lemont, Illinois, a good hour away yet. Whereupon he tossed it away and was soon tearing up into strips some sheets of blank hotel stationery which he took from his breast pocket. He made these strips into a roll and jammed them back into the tiny tobacco sack.

In a moment he was out of the washroom and seated back by the side of the sleeping man. He was not able to get back the sack so easily into the sleeping man's pocket, for he stirred once or twice; but the weasel-faced man got it half-way in, which was sufficient. Then, quite regardless now of the hot sunshine which had driven him ostensibly from his former seat, he went back to that same seat and became deeply interested in a magazine.

It was a long, dreary ride to the next town. Long before they reached it, McCracken had awakened. When the depot bearing the sign "Lemont, Ill.," hove into view at the side of the electric car, the weasel-faced man seized his hat and got off in a hurry.

McCracken began to wonder what Chicago would look like again. A while later he knew, for the train had arrived at its destination and he was riding into the city on a street car.

Reaching Halsted Street, the Mecca of tramps, hobos, foreigners, and labor agents, McCracken went into a drug store and taking a nickel from his pocket, part of the change from the State's ten-dollar bill, stepped into a telephone booth. There he looked up a name in the directory and, by the help of the drug clerk who instructed him in

the intricacies of the dialing system—a system which had come into use during the while he had been sequestered in prison—he succeeded in ringing the number he had obtained from the big tattered book. A young, brisk, businesslike voice answered the phone. Luke McCracken spoke.

"Thought I'd like t' call you up and tell you that my sentence is over," he said. "You was the only one what done anything f'r me at my trial, even though it didn't do much good. I got out a few hours ago and just hit Chi."

"I'm awfully glad to hear it," said the man at the other end, the business-like tone disappearing as though by magic. "You got a rotten deal on that matter, Luke, for my watch *was* right, no matter what the woman testified. Well, Luke, I would like to see you soon. Where are you going to stay? Perhaps I may be able to help you to get reëstablished again."

"Thanks." The cracksman thought for a moment. "I'm goin' down th' street here—Halsted Street—t' the old Star Hotel for a few days, fifty cents a day. It's right near Madison Street. I'm likely to be there f'r a week perhaps; so any night you want to drop in on me—"

"I'll be over, Luke," interrupted the other. "I'm anxious to see you, for I haven't forgotten that we both grew up on old Illinois Street. Star Hotel, Halstead near Madison, eh? All right. See you later."

Outside of the drug store, the ex-convict proceeded along the street until, near Madison, he came upon a cheap hotel the location of which he happened to remember from years back. The old battered painted sign still hung out in front reading: "Star Hotel: rooms fifty cents a night," and the same old, cheap, clattering nickel lunch room still exhaled an odoriferous steamy vapor from the basement of the structure out into the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Halsted Street.

McCracken went straight up to his room as soon as the slatternly looking proprietress handed him a twisted key,

and there, within the narrow four walls with their single iron bed, the washstand and its yellow pitcher, the greasy-marked wall paper and the yellow-lace curtains, flung himself back on the bed with a sigh of relief.

"Thank Gawd!" he breathed. "I'm outa that hole f'r good—an' with three hundred an' twelve-odd bones to buy that there little smokeshop. I suppose I'm lucky after all."

He sat up presently and withdrew the tobacco sack from his pocket. He opened it with a grin of anticipation, but, emptying out the contents, became suddenly aware that something was wrong. There was no silver! There was no green color! And slowly he grew conscious of the fact that he was staring down at strips of white blank paper instead of money. Suddenly he fell back on the bed with a groan.

"My—my poke is lifted," he murmured faintly. "Blank paper! An' now Luke's down to seven dollars and fifty cents in a burg w'ere every bull in the city is ready to railroad him. Why is Fate allus pickin' on the guy that's down? Three year—three year an' nine months—workin' days and nights in that hell hole—all gone up in smoke!" And something like a sob of bitterness escaped the man that the prison authorities had thought hard!

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH THOMAS STEEVER, KNIGHT OF THE ROAD, DISMOUNTS FROM A PASSENGER TRAIN—BUT NOT IN THE DEPOT!

ON A Tuesday night, at about eight o'clock in the evening, Tom Steever dismounted from a C. R. I. & P. passenger train at Chicago.

The method of his dismounting was not the usual one, in which a white-coated, blue-capped porter subserviently places a rubber-covered footstool and assists the passengers to the depot platform. In fact, his dismounting was made under the cover of darkness from the blind baggage, just as the train slowed down at the West Twenty-second Street viaduct to pick its way painstakingly past myriads of confusing red-and-green switchlights into the big downtown depot.

As the coaches rumbled on in the darkness, Steever clambered down from the steep right of way, and picking his way across a low fence, tramped off the cinders onto a dark, dingy street which led into a more brightly lighted one, crossed by the steel viaduct. Here he stood for a moment, shivering slightly, for in spite of the moderate temperature he was chilled through and through from having ridden against a sixty-mile-an-hour wind since sundown, apparently æons before.

Close by Steever's elbows stood a dingy, tottering, once-upon-a-time saloon with a cracked mirror in the window for a crowd of mangy pups to play in front of. The reflection in the mirror, made with the aid of the nearest flickering street light, showed a youthful figure, with clothes showing evidences of having been pressed at some bygone time, but now cindery and dusty; a face appreciably

pinched and hungry, and smeared with smoke and soot from the engine tender; eyes just a little sunken; hair tousled and rumpled under a soft, dark cap.

The original of the reflection smiled a rueful smile, and gazing about him spied near by a closed feed store with that anachronism of anachronisms—a horse trough—in front of it. Whereupon he made his way in that direction.

Here, from an inside pocket, he produced a cake of thin yellow laundry soap, a paper package containing one celluloid collar, and an aluminum comb with half of its teeth gone. By dint of much scrubbing and splashing under the faucet and much stinging, acrid lather, his pinched face gradually emerged into a condition of shininess, and when the bandanna handkerchief had been removed from his neck, the shiny celluloid collar fastened to the black-cotton shirt, and the suit dusted vigorously with a wisp of brittle straw picked up at the door of the feed store, he resembled—well, at least half suggested—a workingman on his way home from work, rather than a restless wanderer of the twin rails.

Steever soon left the dark street and was out on the brightly lighted one with which it intersected. A blue-enamel sign on the corner arc light proclaimed this thoroughfare to be West Twenty-second Street. Here, however, more or less to his surprise, Steever found that he was in nothing less than Chinatown, for the stores all bore strange Chinese hieroglyphics; here and there green-silk dragons waved in the breeze, and everywhere soft-footed, blue-bloused Celestials were threading their way noiselessly back and forth along the sidewalks.

Steever trudged westward for a few blocks, thinking of the acute and gnawing pain in his stomach—the pain that was caused by the want of food, real, warm, material, tasty. He did not fumble in his pockets for money to buy food with, for the simple reason that he knew full well that nothing in the shape of a coin reposed there. At length,

with a long sigh, he realized that once more he must take a chance on "panhandling on the stem," a chance which threatened a sentence in the workhouse of from sixty days to a year. Confound such a miserable existence!

A silk-hatted man, accompanied by his wife with an armful of bundles which she evidently had purchased in a Chinese delicacy store, stepped out toward the curbing to a waiting automobile. Steever, with one keen look at them and another at the gold monogram on the car, stepped forward just as the woman got in with a pleasant ripple of laughter and the rustle of silk garments. The silk-hatted man turned to give some directions to the chauffeur.

"Mister, I'm terribly hungry," Steever said frankly. "Could you spare a chap a nickel for a cup of coffee-and?"

The silk-hatted man looked down at him. "Hungry, eh?" His eyes roved up and down the trim, well-knit but thin figure, and he added, not unkindly: "A good strong fellow like you shouldn't be hungry. Think of all the work there is to be had. Now if I were out of work, it would be different, for I'm an old man."

Steever, from much experience garnered from coast to coast, had got to know men, especially during the psychological process of panhandling. This silk-hatted man was in a warm mood on this evening. He knew that it was the time to press his claims. He glanced along the street. No officers of the law were to be seen.

"I—I was in the Pittsburgh mills," he said hurriedly. "I left 'em a few months ago. When I came out of 'em"—he tapped on his right leg—"I had this leg here." He raised it stiffly up.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the silk-hatted man. "And the steel mills got your leg, did they? Too bad! I'm sorry. Here!" He reached into the pocket of his black suit and withdrew a silver coin. "Here's a quarter instead of a nickel," he said. "Get yourself something to eat." And with a curt nod toward the chauffeur as though something most

unpleasant had suddenly projected itself across his life, he jumped into the machine and left Steever standing there with the quarter clutched in his hand. And how was Steever to know that the silk-hatted gentleman was a heavy stockholder in several steel mills, reaching from Chicago to Pittsburgh?

Steever watched the machine drive off, and then with a half smile he turned and proceeded west along Twenty-second Street again. "That play seemed to hit him in the right spot. I wonder why?" he said to himself. "Just said that when I came out of the mills I had this leg here. That's camouflage, eh? What other leg could I have?" He laughed an uneasy, restless, bitter laugh. "So be it! Better to panhandle than starve. Seems as if it—"

His reflections upon the matter were cut short by the sudden coming from around the corner where he was standing of a blue patrol wagon. It drove up to the curb, and two police officers, laughing easily and apparently on some casual errand, dismounted. They went up a narrow stairway, which led, as Steever could see by looking upward, to a small chop-suey restaurant.

Indeed, had his eyes been less observant, his nose would have told him that much, for the warm, fragrant, appetizing odors that ran down that narrow stairway turned him suddenly faint and caused him to clutch the silver quarter all the tighter in his hand.

He did not have long to wait for developments in the matter of the two vanished bluecoats, for they came down the stairs leading between them a gesticulating young Chinese, who sputtered in a thousand gutturals and talked with every finger and bone of his two hands at the same time. All three got into the patrol wagon, it drove off into the night, and the tiny fragmentary drama was over.

"Well—that Chink was certainly excited," mused Steever. "Wonder what they were pinching him for?" He stood for a moment. The hunger contractions in his stomach

became stronger. A sign with crudely made English letters at the side of the door announced the existence of chop-suey upstairs—twenty-five cents to all comers! The odor of the rich meaty dishes above also became stronger.

He sighed—a long, deep sigh. It was no use to try to conserve part of the evening's "touch." The strain was too great. He turned mechanically up the narrow stairs and was soon striding into a tiny restaurant fitted with cheap tables and chairs. There he dropped into the nearest seat and waited until a fat Chinaman with a napkin on his elbow approached.

"Tau," he said succinctly, which to the initiated means "one chop suey, Chinese style," and which made the Celestial smile. "And make it quick and hot and big, Charley," Steever added.

The fat Chinaman hobbled off. Steever gazed around the tiny restaurant. It was undoubtedly one of those whose existence depended solely upon hungry slumming parties touring Chinatown, for its simple furnishings never would pass muster down in the heart of a big city. Its extremely moderate quotation downstairs of chop-suey at twenty-five cents was evidently a decoy intended to lure the hungry upstairs, for the huge bill-of-fare emblazoned with red and gold dragons on the table showed many dishes of queer and fantastic names, and prices that were not so moderate, to say the least.

Steever drummed impatiently on the table, and at last the fat Celestial bore down upon his table bearing a tray with a huge bowl of the Chinese dish which is said to be unknown in China itself. A moment later Steever was left alone with the bowl like a god on Olympus with a meal of ambrosia.

He devoured the contents rapidly, hungrily, ravenously, the food seeming to vanish by magic, while courage and strength seemed to seep into his veins. But near the bottom of the bowl his teeth clicked together on something hard;

something which made him bite out a sharp ejaculation. "A bone," he said, "or—or a stone."

He removed from his lips the offending article which might in less fortunate circumstances have cost him a molar, or a corner of one, and to his surprise it appeared to be a green stone of irregular shape. But underneath the stain on it he saw—or fancied he saw—the yellow gleam of gold. Hastily he seized the tissue-paper napkin which he had been using and, wiping the thing carefully off, found himself able for the first time to ascertain what his teeth had bitten down upon.

It was a tiny, delicately carved hand of green jade. It was hardly an inch long—and weighed but a fraction of an ounce. Its index finger was outstretched, pointing, and upon it was an almost threadlike ring of gold. But—strange to relate—the hand held five fingers in addition to the thumb!

Steever glared down at it for several seconds. His first impulse was to call the Celestial and complain, but a second thought—a half appreciation of the artistic value of the thing and of that material known as Chinese jade, as well as the gleam of the delicate gold ring—caused him to halt short in his intentions.

Instead, he washed the tiny hand with a corner of the napkin and some water from his tumbler, after which he stuck it in his vest pocket and hastily finished his bowl of chop suey. Throwing his quarter, all he had in the world, on the glass top of the little counter filled with cigars and surmounted by a cheap rickety cash register, he stumbled down the stairs into the realm of bright electric lights, hieroglyphics, and Chinese dragons of green silk.

Here, a look westward showed him that the district was a cheap factory region, deserted and lonely. So he turned back in the direction he had come, and walking rapidly eastward soon passed under the same viaduct from which

he had dismounted a short while before, and Chinatown now lay in his rear.

Considerably to the east he could discern a car line and bright lights. On toward this artery of life and light he proceeded, and when he reached it he found that he was on South State Street. Farther eastward were more signs of life and activity, and as he paused uncertainly his eyes fell upon a flapping sign in front of a low store in the next block. The words upon the sign read simply "Curios," and "14."

"A curio store!" Steever ejaculated. He took the green-jade hand from his pocket and inspected it. "Green jade, all right! Wonder if I can't turn it over for six bits or so? I'll try."

He crossed State Street and proceeded along a few numbers, where he descended into a basement shop, the windows of which held butterflies, weapons, scarabs, teakwood boxes, and all sorts of strange odds and ends in the way of curios. A man with a long nose and gray, rumpled hair approached him from behind a counter that was surmounted by a cluster of incandescents.

Steever thrust forth the green-jade hand, and with a yawn asked: "How much'll you give me for this? Real jade."

The proprietor fingered it, his face lighting up a trifle as he perceived the delicate, almost cameolike carving. He gave but a casual inspection to the filigree of gold that served as a ring. "Your own?" he asked.

Steever nodded. Artificial legs or property rights were phases of the truth which had not troubled him for a long while.

"Green jade is not very rare," said the long-nosed man, placing it on the counter. "And this is dappled a bit in the bargain. Delicate piece of carving, though. Might make a fair watch fob." He paused. "How much do you want?"

"Two dollars," Steever replied.

The proprietor laughed derisively. "Couldn't think of it. Give you a dollar. That's the best I can do."

"O. K.," said Steever quickly. "I need the money."

The long-nosed man rang his cash register and withdrew a silver dollar which he tossed over to the customer—or was he himself the customer? With the dollar, Steever marched out. He hurried from the place and around the corner, half fearing that the buyer might run after him to call the transaction off.

"It was a lucky night for me," he murmured, after he was a block away. "A buck and a quarter clear, inside of three quarters of an hour? That's what we call finance. And now, I'm going to use the one dollar and my full stomach to try once more to get another start in life. Who knows but maybe that nutty green-jade hand with the six fingers is the hand of Fate?" He looked up and down the street. "First, though, where's the nearest ten-cent flop house?"

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH MR. JECH VISITS THE POLICE STATION IN MUCH WRATH

ON A Wednesday morning, Casimer Jech, in his curio store on East Twenty-second Street, threw down with an exclamation of disgust the morning paper he was reading. He rose from his chair and paced angrily up and down the floor, from the store into the office at the rear and back into the store again. "The third time in this neighborhood," he muttered angrily to himself. "The third time in succession!"

For several minutes he continued to pace up and down, the frown of anger on his long-nosed face never melting an iota. At length, seeming to calm down a slight bit, he passed once more to the back of the store and up the single wooden step into the office, where, closing behind him the match-board door in the partition displaying his safe to the street, he snapped on the overhanging cluster of lights that illuminated the whole room brilliantly.

He fumbled for the fraction of a minute now inside his clothing for that key which hung around his neck by a long leather thong—that key which gave entrance to his ancient safe which seemed, indeed, itself only some curio like everything else in this place, waiting a customer like the rest. The light from the cluster of incandescents brought out every scratch and indentation, every angle and corner and remnant of black paint, of that ponderous cubicle whose weight might have been a quarter of a ton—or even six hundred pounds. And it illuminated an object which breathed an air of history that belonged to the general atmosphere of this queer establishment, for not only had the safe quite evidently been cast in days before the mod-

ern combination dial had been thought of, but it had moreover been through a fierce fire at some far-gone day, for its door was warped as though the most intense of flames had played over the entire mass of metal, and it could be seen with little difficulty that that door no longer fitted snugly into the framework machined for it. Indeed, it was evident that the very lock itself must have melted in those flames, and that the original owner had had to chisel away both lock and site to operate the single sliding bolt and gain access to the charred remains of his papers and, perhaps, Civil War currency, for a square of powerful steel containing a single milled slot—literally a section of armor plate a half-inch thick—had been riveted by four rivets over the site of the old lockwork. And that newer and no doubt more thief-proof mechanism had been installed in the open orifice back of this steel plate was indicated by the long-stemmed but powerful key which Jech at last succeeded in extracting through his shirt-bosom to the extent that the long leather thong holding it around his neck permitted, for the key's complicated notches and prongs suggested from the extreme intricacy of their pattern that if the safe and lockmakers of several decades back could not construct an impregnable strongbox, they could at least create an unpickable lock, Messrs. Yale and Corbin notwithstanding! Still gloomy of countenance, Jech leaned far over and, thrusting his key into the snug-fitting slot in the steel plate, felt around with it like a man who has acquired a certain sixth or "tumbler-sense," and suddenly turning it, drew with it, as by a handle, the big door creakingly open.

For a second he surveyed morosely the loosely fitting wooden case that comprised the back of the safe; there was that and nothing else visible. It was a case which at the bottom was a cabinet, and at the top consisted of various shallow rickety wooden drawers; but all classified apparently and ticketed as well. One by one he drew out the

drawers half way and gazed in them each with dubious mien. In the top one was a hard, fire-baked tablet of clay with cuneiform inscriptions on it; a genuine clay promissory note from ancient Babylon, Jech knew as he gazed on it, from the Neo-Babylonian or Persian period, and probably payable to the Sons of Murashu, the money lenders of that time. There were many such tablets in existence, to be sure, for people were harassed by their financial problems in those days too; still it was worth, conservatively, a thousand dollars to a collector with a Babylonian complex! In the second drawer was an ancient leather-bound book which had given Jech the most trying five minutes of his life in Snodgrass' auction rooms just four troublous days before; a book which was known as a Vindelinus, and whose counterpart, in the British Museum, was of less value than even this copy. A motley assortment of things lay in the third drawer: a gold and turquoise three-part badge or emblem representing membership in the Royal Order of the Redeemer, the senior order of Greece, founded in 1833 by King Otto to commemorate the overthrow of Turkish rule and the reëstablishment of Grecian independence, and bearing a date which showed it to be one of the first emblems struck off; a beautiful imitation of the famous Josephine necklace, given by Napoleon Bonaparte to Josephine and made of amber, worth many hundreds of dollars merely as a specimen of carving and real amber, quite aside from its being a perfect artistic reproduction of a world-famous Louvre curio appraised in 1896 by the French Chamber of Deputies as worth $150,000. In the third drawer lay a copy of the spurious issue of Sir Thomas Browne's "Religio Medici" which appeared one year before the first and genuine edition, and which bore, as Jech happened to know without opening it to-day, Sir Thomas' own notes and corrections. $2,000 that book was worth because of those handwritten interlineations, and it was even now waiting submission to an Eastern museum which purchased

only old books containing the actual handwriting of their own authors. Now Jech ran his fingers down several drawers and pulled out one near the bottom: a beautiful Austrian silver platter, hammered by hand, carried carelessly on its concave surface, illy protected by a strip of cotton felt between, a Royal Dresden China platter from no less than the famous Sanborn collection; and in one corner of the drawer lay a unique imitation of the famous lost Confederate Seal, known to be buried by James Jones, the ancient negro employe in the senate office and servant to Jefferson Davis, when Davis was captured. It was plainly engraved "replica," and had no rightful place, Jech saw, in this collection; so he took it out and placed it to one side. Now from another drawer he took a huge pear-shaped pearl which happened to be, he knew, only an imitation thereof—an imitation, in fact, of the famous Georgibus or Gogibus Pearl of Calais, found in the Indies, weighing 517.36 grains, and sold to Philip IV of Spain for 80,000 ducats. Woolworth's 5-and-10-cent store, Jech recalled at this juncture, was getting together an imitation collection of world-famous jewels, and he could dispose of this valueless but unique imitation to them for probably ten dollars.

In the next to the bottom drawer lay a number of coins; he picked up one with rounded edges. It was gold—greenish gold. It was a coin of the third mintage of Croesus, last king of Lydia, and the first great international banker whose name had been a symbol of wealth for 2500 years. Coined it must have been some time between 561 B. C. when Croesus ascended the Lydian throne, and 546 when he was captured by Cyrus, the Persian monarch. Jech gazed with unseeing eyes first at the bull head on one side of the golden disc, and then equally absently at the lion's head on the other. He now picked up a coin that, in a little blue velvet plush box, lay to one side of it. This coin was silver, and it was a shekel plowed up on Mount Zion

and coined during the time of Moses and Aaron in about the year 1490 B. C. Worth, as a mere shekel, about sixty cents to-day in American money, this simple little disc bearing Aaron's head on one side, and a shepherd and his flock on the other, was worth several thousand dollars when the right coin collector came along. And Jech had bought it himself in Jerusalem for exactly $1,100.

He took only a passing peep in the bottom drawer. Here, lying on its back, was a delicate little figure in alabaster and wood, with gold filigree work; an Egyptian goddess with big outlined eyes. It was a statue of Selket, one of three golden goddesses who had stood guard over the tomb and sarcophagus of some unknown Egyptian gentleman.

At length, with face glowering, Jech closed the drawers on his treasures. He did not go into the cabinet portion, nor further into the drawers themselves, but instead closed the safe door on the whole outfit, and turned his key again till he heard the settling of the single steel bolt into its socket. Then dropping the key back inside his shirt where he felt its cool metal against the skin of his chest, and the increased weight of the thong around his neck, he rose to his feet and passed rearward through a second matchboard partition into a small dirty, dark room, cobwebbed and filled with junk and looking out on a deserted rear yard. He stood thus for a second pondering and then, as though he had come to a decision of some sort, he seized his old-fashioned fedora hat, and left the store, locking the door behind him. He crossed South State Street and walked rapidly westward, passed along Chinatown, and at last entered the dingy portals of a police station on the windows of which were painted the words: "Thirty-fifth District Police Headquarters."

Here he strode past the desk sergeant's counter to the door of a room with which he seemed to have some familiarity, and dropping down on the hard wooden bench out-

side he proceeded to wait while some one stationed there ahead of him was ushered inside the magic portals and the door closed behind him.

As Jech waited he occupied his time moodily studying the battered walls and splintered woodwork, changing his position once on the long bench to give room to a tattered youth who was scrubbing away at the softwood floor and crooning a peculiar meaningless song in a high falsetto. And as the scrubman completed his job and rose to his feet with his pail of soapy water, Jech noticed on the soiled cotton shirt a huge tin star, almost as big as a saucer, evidently cut by scissors from some such thing as a discarded kitchen utensil. But as he stared, puzzled, at the man's retreating form, the door behind him opened and the visitor who was delaying him stepped out.

The uniformed policeman who had stepped out with the visitor, questioned Jech. "You wished to see—"

"Chief O'Toole, please."

"Just go right in, then. He's at liberty now."

Jech rose from the bench and walked in. On his face were still the traces of the anger that had suffused it a while back when he had been reading the morning paper. The room in which he stood was a typical police-inquisition room, filled with ancient furniture that had been there for countless political dynasties, its old-fashioned woodwork cut from the planing mills of another age.

At a desk near the window sat a blue-clad individual with an old battered police cap cocked on one side of his head, and a long, dark, unlighted cigar in his mouth. His neck was thick, red, and beefy.

Jech sat down at the edge of the table. "Morning, Chief O'Toole," he said.

The beefy-necked man nodded. "Morning, Jech. How's the curio business going?" The police official regarded him curiously. "What can I do for you, Jech?"

"I have come, Chief O'Toole," said Jech, "to protest

vigorously and emphatically at the sort of police protection we're getting here in the Twenty-second Street neighborhood during the last six months."

The police official, surprised, spun round in his swivel chair. "In what way—" he began.

Jech politely interrupted him. "There have been three burglaries in this neighborhood during the last few weeks, Chief, and in not one case, according to the newspapers, was there an officer even within shouting distance. Also, in not one was the offender, or offenders, captured. As a taxpayer, and a small business man, I vehemently protest against that kind of thing going on where my business, my livelihood, is located. My business is a more valuable thing than it appears; I am forced to keep in my safe overnight things of the greatest of value. Yet, for some reason, along about midnight not a patrolman from these headquarters can be found. Why is it? I demand some satisfaction. I am a taxpayer and a business man. I—"

"Now listen here, Jech," said the police official, a little discomposed, "you're taking it on yourself to blame the Thirty-fifth district headquarters here for the fact that there have been three jobs within the last few weeks that haven't been run down. What on earth, man, do you think this office is? Do you suppose that a night patrolman can be every place at once? Do you suppose—"

"I do not suppose anything," interrupted Jech frigidly; "all I know is that this district certainly isn't being covered; that it isn't getting the proper police protection it should. I live above my shop, chief, but I'm pretty deaf. In fact, if the light wasn't on your lips now, I couldn't talk with you intelligently. So much for that. I can't move my shop to another district, for I'm established here. I cannot keep my most valuable curios in a downtown safety vault, for collectors come to my place at every hour of the day, every day in the year, from every point on the earth. Yet here are three burglaries in my neighborhood,

one a safe-blowing episode pulled off by a couple of colored women—I refer to the one at the Goodrich Cracker Bakery offices last night—and not one of the three jobs even was disturbed by a patrolman. Where do I get off at on protection?"

The beefy-necked O'Toole withdrew his cigar from his mouth and gazed thoughtfully at the desk. A keen psychologist could have discerned that his visitor had touched him on a raw, sore point—a point which his superiors had already probed with their official lancets.

"Jech," he said after a while, "this is nothing more than an epidemic of crime that always springs up at this season of the year. At the same time, however, the central offices have reduced the working force of this station so that our night patrolmen are actually covering twice as much territory as before. They refuse point-blank to enlarge my night force. What can I do? A night man can't be every place at once. If he's in one spot and a burglary takes place a mile away, it's not the fault of this office; let me tell you that straight from the shoulder."

He paused. "And by the way," he went on, "I note your reference to the Goodrich Cracker Bakery job as a job pulled off by a couple of colored women. What has the female aspect of it got to do with the matter of protection, anyway?" A note of cornered belligerency was in O'Toole's face.

"What's it got to do with it?" snorted Jech. "What's it got to do with it?" he repeated sneeringly. "I read the whole dope told the reporters by the watchman when he was untied this morning. If the police are going to let a couple of women—"

"Wait!" interrupted O'Toole wearily. "Wait, please, Jech! Don't be starting in to gibe us here on the newspaper stuff until you learn how much you don't know. The watchman told the reporters that the women who pulled the job were colored and talked to each other in women's voices,

didn't he? And so, according to that, you fault-finding business men think we're asleep on the job." He broke off the ash from his cigar. "I might as well tell you, Jech, that we know exactly who these two colored women safeblowers are, and it's only a question of time before they go over the road."

"The devil you say!" ejaculated Jech. "And they *are* women, are they?"

O'Toole nodded wearily. "Yes. Two former circus people —strong-arm women. Grew up in the black belt here— acrobats. They were once known as the Indian Sisters from Rangoon, but they're really Sally and Opey Harris, formerly of Thirty-ninth Street. Did a trapeze act together in the Beifield & Levy circus in 1927. Their first job was pulled in Birmingham, Alabama. The office has built up the whole case around them piece by piece. They can't get away with such stuff indefinitely. They're tough, and they're clever, and they're daring, and in physical make-up they're regular amazons. They would throttle a man to death if he even grappled with them. But they—"

"Yeah," sneered Jech, "and while you've got their identity down from A to Izzard you can't land them. That's always the—"

He was interrupted by the ringing of the telephone bell at O'Toole's elbow. The police head took down the receiver hastily. "Hello."

A squeaking followed.

"Good!" O'Toole exclaimed. "Quick work, my boy! Congratulations! See you later."

He hung up and turned to Jech with a satisfied look crowning his hitherto embarrassed face.

"Thus ends the Goodrich Cracker Bakery job of last night," he announced. "The Harris Sisters have been arrested in a house on Forty-seventh Street in the black belt. Now you were saying?" he inquired triumphantly.

Jech was nonplussed. "I congratulate you for arresting

two females marked with the color of ebony," he said. "It is a distinct police triumph. There are other jobs being pulled off weekly in this district. What do you say toward having some precautions against the jobs being pulled off —instead of arresting the culprits afterward and pulling down a bit of police glory?"

O'Toole sighed. "See here, Jech. I'll bet if everything in your old safe and whole store combined was melted up or scrapped, that you wouldn't have fifty dollars in actual bulk gold, silver and other precious metals, and leather altogether. How about it?"

"I daresay you're right," admitted Jech coolly. "What of it?"

"Well, don't you think storebreakers have to figure on the probable bulk value of things they steal? They can't market things like yours, Jech—things that have to be authenticated, such as curios and so forth. You're not in any danger of burglary at all, so far as I can see."

"I can't see it at all," retorted Jech sourly. "There's crooked collectors, O'Toole, who would buy anything that was gotten in any illegitimate way. That's the sort of thing that your department never comes into contact with. Something for you to think about." Perhaps even as he spoke, Jech was thinking of old Amos Carrington, still lying in his apoplectic semi-coma on Lake Shore Drive, and perhaps he wasn't at all. Who knows?

"Yes," said O'Toole, "but a professional thief's got to learn to whom things like that are valuable. And he's got no way to know that."

"Don't fool yourself," said Jech abruptly. "But all this isn't the question anyway," he added irritably. "Assuming that I haven't any bulk value in my store or my safe—assuming that a $300 suit of medieval mail is worth about twenty-five cents as old iron—it doesn't mean that some burglar might not single me out thinking that I've got money galore lying around. What's worse, I've known of

vandals to wilfully destroy valuable stocks out of wantonness just because they didn't get a nice haul."

"Leave a thousand dollars on top of your safe then," said O'Toole facetiously. "Consolation prize. Insurance!"

"Come, come, O'Toole," broke in Jech. "This isn't a subject for joking. My stock is valuable. And I'm not getting protection for it such as I should have."

O'Toole chewed his under lip. He did not attempt now to argue further or even to joke with his obdurate visitor. "If it is then," he said at length, "have you considered trying private watchmen?"

Jech gave a bitter laugh. "Why should I pay out my money for private watchmen? No; I don't have to when I'm paying taxes to the city. As a taxpayer and a small business man I'm going to demand my rights. And those rights are summed up in the three words: Municipal police protection."

"The law," said O'Toole sullenly, "doesn't give you any particular right to more protection than any other small business has. We are not responsible here for any crimes, or for a lack of night patrolman to handle them. We—" He looked at Jech. "You say you're being bothered with deafness?"

Jech nodded. "More than that. As I said, I'm relying more every year now on lip reading. Indeed I cannot hear very well, chief. I live up above my shop and couldn't tell if the place was jam full of cracksmen."

"Hm! I see." O'Toole reflected a moment. He reached over on his desk and pressed a button. "I'll tell you exactly what I would do if I were in your place, Jech. Whether you actually care for the advice or not, I don't know; but I'm going to give it to you just the same. I—" The door opened, and the bluecoated police officer stuck his head in. "Send Simple in, Hennesy." He turned to Jech. "Excuse me for a second till I take care of something I forgot; then I'll hop back to the subject in hand."

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH CHIEF O'TOOLE, CRIMINOLOGIST OF SORTS, HANDS OUT SOME GRATUITOUS ADVICE

JECH sat back in his chair and waited. The door opened, and in walked the same odd figure who had been scrubbing away on the station floor in the vicinity of Jech's feet. In build he seemed to be about twenty-five years of age, but in his general actions he radiated the appearance of a grown-up child. His freckled face with its silly, vacuous look, his tousled yellow hair, his lone suspender holding up his ragged trousers, together with the enormous tin star on his shirt, all combined to make Jech stare bewilderedly in spite of his state of irritation.

When the creature spoke, it was in a babyish shrill voice. "P'liceman Hennsy 'e say, zur, you'm wan' to see me," he said with a grimace.

"Yes, Simple. Did you finish the station floor?"

"Oh, yiss, zur. Oi scrub 'em twice."

"Mop out that cell room downstairs?"

"Cell room, zur? Yiss, zur."

"All right, Simple. After this mop out that cell room twice a day, get me?" He reached over on the desk and took up a paper. "Rush this deposition over to Hannley & Crague, the cigar store on the corner. It belongs to Hannley. Give it to him."

The youth stretched out his hand for the paper, but suddenly stopped. A great gong clanged in the station house. At once he straightened up. A still stranger light flashed into the vacant blue eyes. He appeared to be oblivious to the room, to the outstretched hand with the paper. Outside in the paved alley below Jech could hear the rolling doors of the garage sliding back to let out the automobile patrol. From somewhere, evidently, there was a call

for "the wagon." The creature in front of them, with a glance down at his great tin star, wheeled and was gone.

The chief smiled and shook his head despairingly. He stepped to the window. Then he beckoned Jech over. Jech, standing at his shoulder, could see the blue patrol wagon coming down the alley and slowing up at a tiny door to take on a plain-clothes man or two, assigned to such emergency calls. He watched curiously. The two swung on, and one with a laugh held open the barred door of the patrol wagon while a third clambered pellmell in. And the third was the freckle-faced creature to whom O'Toole had just been talking! Now he was slightly transformed, for the yellow unkempt hair was crowned by an ancient police hat of the vintage of 1907, its crown almost parting from its rim. The patrol clanged away.

Jech turned away from the window and dropped back into his chair. "It's none o' my business, chief," he said, "but will you tell me what in the name of Heaven that fellow is?"

O'Toole smiled. "He's a strange bird. His name is Simon Grundt. Simple Simon we call him; Simple for short. He's a harmless halfwit. Off-spring of a group of families in southern Illinois that are all paupers and morons. The Grundt family, a main branch of the famous Jukes family. The family and all its branches have been written up in the text-books on heredity and feeblemindedness. Managed to run away from the State institution for the feebleminded at Lincoln, Illinois, a half year or so ago, boarded a box car, and of course got picked up in the yards here. The railroad detective brought him over here. Simple was a sort of a joke to the boys at first. Imagined he was cut out to be a famous detective—out-and-out obsession grafted on his feeblemindedness." O'Toole stopped.

"He looks the part," commented Jech, "with that enormous tin star and that bonnet."

O'Toole smiled. "Yes; he does for a fact. Simple as he is,

though, he's a shrewd simpleton. Knows dates and faces. Reads one and two syllable words. Counts money on his fingers, and you can't cheat him to save your life. The boys played with him for a while, made him that star out of an old pie plate, donated that old police hat to him, and gave him a place downstairs to sleep till some arrangements could be made for sending him back to the Lincoln institution. But too much red tape. No arrangements were ever made.

"Simple started in the first day he was here to do the chores," the official went on. "Scrubs up the place every day from top to bottom, mops out the basement, runs errands, washes and polishes the windows, and sleeps downstairs on a cot in the cell room and eats the leavings from the mess room. He's the best investment the place ever had as a janitor, with the one exception that when the gong for the wagon sounds he drops everything and sails out with the boys as the great detective. It's a shame to kid him, but we can't get along without him now; so we humor him."

The chief drummed with his fingers on his desk for a minute; then he went on: "Well, you don't care about Simple, Jech. The point, of course, is that you've come here to get additional police protection, and I've just explained what the situation is. But I—I said that I was going to give you some solid advice. And here it is: If your stock is really valuable, then I can only say that you'll have to return to the law of olden times—every man his own defender and guard. My advice to you, Jech, is to rig up a good burglar alarm connected with the rear window or something like that—an alarm that will ring a bell close by your bedside. What you'll need is something that will ring close to your ear and awaken you instantly if everything isn't according to Hoyle downstairs. And I advise you also to get the biggest six-shooter you can buy—and use it if necessary. That's—that's all I can say."

"Which is poor satisfaction," commented Jech bitterly.

"This is the first time in twenty years that I've felt insecure in this neighborhood. However, I guess you're right. I still think that my taxes should pay for my police protection; but if they don't, then I'll have to take care of myself. And I'll—I'll do it with a vengeance," he added, rising from his chair, "if any one tries to fool with any of my doors or windows or tries to monkey with my safe!" He nodded his head. "Very well, chief. Sorry I troubled you."

"No trouble at all," returned O'Toole, his fat face openly reflecting his secret satisfaction at the departure of his obdurate visitor. "I hardly anticipate any more of this stuff, Jech. Thieves and cracksmen most always lay off of a district where a few successful jobs have been pulled off."

Jech bowed himself coldly out. He threaded his way back to State Street, but instead of going on to his shop he took a car for the downtown section. There, in the electrical department of one of the big department stores, he bought several coils of cotton-covered bell wire, some dry batteries, some electric bells provided with strong electro-magnets, some switches, and a whole host of miscellaneous electrical paraphernalia, as well as screws and staples of various sizes.

From there he went directly to a pawnshop over on the tawdry thoroughfare of South Clark Street. Inside, he looked over several blue-steel weapons which were shown him, and at last found one that suited him. He bought a box of cartridges for it, and for the two paid eleven dollars and fifty cents. Then he went back to State Street, his arms full of bundles.

"That was a good idea," he muttered to himself as he got on a car bound for Twenty-second Street, "that the chief slipped me. An alarm! Every man his own protector. And now God help the crook that tries to monkey around my store in the middle of the night!" He felt in his pocket. The outline of the blue-steel revolver was very evident. Jech smiled grimly.

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH SADIE HIPPOLYTE, A FAIR DENIZEN OF CLEVELAND, GOES TO CHICAGO ON A MOST STRANGE ERRAND

IN THE second coach of the Cleveland-Chicago express Sadie Hippolyte sat, tired and weary. For hours, so it seemed to her, the train had been crawling past interminable flat fields that spanned the distance between the two big lake cities. She sat with her chin in her hands, staring out absently over the scurrying fence-posts, thinking of many things. She wished devoutly that she had not possessed the eternal feminine's fear of the air—that she had taken the Cleveland-Chicago airways route that would have brought her to her destination in four hours at the very most. Strange, that she of all women, should be afraid of a modern development. Maybe she was getting old. Which dread thought, constituting no pleasure to any woman, young or old, she drove hastily from her mind by thinking again of other things. She fell to wondering again, as she had over many miles of this journey, what results her strange mission to Chicago would bring. An observer might have discerned on the rather hard, yet doll-like face with its penciled eyebrows, that matched the neat and slightly flashy-checked traveling suit, a look of profound worry.

Six o'clock came, and the monotonous fields were shut out by the dropping of the black curtain of night and the lighting of the incandescents inside the coach. Yet never once did Sadie Hippolyte take her chin from her hands, or turn her gaze from the velvet curtain which now marked the speeding landscape.

When Chicago was reached she was one of the first to gather up her traveling bag and get out into the station. Here, consulting a tiny city guide, she took a taxicab

over to the North Side, and entering the quiet, semi-fashionable Ontario Hotel on Ontario Street, registered simply: Sadie R. Hippolyte, Cleveland, Ohio.

When that was done and her luggage carried to her room, she dabbled at a meal in the hotel dining room and shortly after, considerably refreshed, ordered a taxicab. When the driver asked where she wished to go, she told him simply: "Drive me to your Chinatown. And take me to some main store there where I may make some inquiries, please."

She climbed in, and the taxicab carried her over the North Side to the dark, oily-looking Chicago River; from there out south to Archer Avenue, and in turn some distance southwestward on that great diagonal thoroughfare until it intersected with West Twenty-second Street.

Here, indeed, judging from the nature of the region, was Chinatown. The machine slowed up in front of a store where two old Chinamen in European clothing stood just inside the door, and the driver stopped and poked in his head. "Lady," he asked, "is this here place what you want?"

But already the woman was getting out. "Please wait here," she ordered.

She walked quickly into the store, which was full of an odor of incense and Chinese vegetables. One of the two old Celestials came forward, a smile of welcome on his seamed yellow face. "Whatee I can do for you, leddy?" he asked politely in his quaint gutturals. "You mebbe likee buy—"

"Not to-day," she said curtly. "I wish to ask a question. Who is the controlling man over this section of the city? That is, who of your race rules you all—acts as a sort of governor over your people here in Chicago?"

"No unlestan," the man said, wrinkling up his brows.

"Who," she said impatiently, "isee big king in Chinatown?"

"Oh!" He grinned from ear to ear. "Biggee king, eh?

Now I know, leddy. You wantee see Wah Hung Fung. He live' in biggee brownstone hous' at 1950 Archer Evvynoo."

"Wah Hung Fung," she repeated. "1950 Archer Avenue, eh? I see. Thank you." She swept from the place and back to her machine. "Drive me to 1950 Archer Avenue," she requested her driver.

Five minutes later the machine, retracing its path along the diagonal street, had drawn up before a beautiful brownstone residence, built in between two disreputable-looking, ramshackle wooden buildings. A splendid Chinese flag of green silk with a brightly embroidered gold dragon on it hung out over the solitary chandelier that lighted up the entrance, and the expensive stained-glass windows and doors bore more of the quaint Celestial beasts. It was, perhaps, the most pretentious place she had yet glimpsed in that old run-down part of the city comprising Chinatown, and she knew instinctively that she was on the right track.

Again she left the cab and, going up the stone steps, rang the bell. A lengthy pause followed, and just as she was about to ring again a yellow-skinned servant swung back the portals with disconcerting silence. "I—I wish to see Mr. Wah—Mr. Wah Hung Fung," she said.

The Chinese stepped back and swung open the door wider. "Please to step in," he said in precise English. With a bow he motioned to a large room off the tiny entrance chamber, full of ancient Chinese teakwood cabinets, Chinese screens with miraculous and painstakingly worked designs upon them, inlaid furniture, and quaint pictures done in Chinese water colors.

An adjoining room to this, the door of which was half open, showed a great square space which was evidently a library, for shelves galore contained bound books and manuscripts, most of the manuscripts being made of vividly colored paper and bound by silk strings, showing plainly that they were literary products of another land. Sadie Hippolyte dropped into a comfortable-looking teakwood

armchair, and nervously tapped her heel on the floor as she waited.

Of a sudden a tiny door at her right, almost concealed by a screen, opened, and a tall erect man of fifty years or so swept into the room. He was dressed in full Chinese regalia, gorgeous in its vivid red-and-green-silk colors and its gold-worked dragons on the blouse and pantaloons. A tiny cap of gold and black adorned his head, and his mustache hung down on either side of his thin, colorless lips. Over his wide, deep-seeing eyes were a thick pair of hornshell-rimmed glasses. He paused a moment and then spoke.

"You wished to see me?" His enunciation was perfect.

Sadie stared at him. He was, she reflected, indeed a most gorgeous bird, suggesting somehow the peacock.

"You—you are Mr. Wah Hung Fung?" she asked after a moment.

"I am."

"Mr. Wah—and you can perceive from my use of your first name as your surname that I am slightly acquainted with Chinese customs—I understand that you are a sort of a governor or chief of your people in this region of Chicago. And it has occurred to me that you can give me some information which I have come clear from Cleveland to get."

He sank into a teakwood chair across from her and regarded her curiously, his lean yellow hands clutching the arms of the chair. "Pray, go on," he said. "I occupy a position somewhat dignified among my children here in Chicago."

"What I have come for," the woman went on breathlessly, "is merely to find the whereabouts of a Chinese who lived in my rooming house in Cleveland. His name is Li Ling Lee. He left Cleveland about two weeks ago. He was to come to Chicago where he formerly lived. I wish to see him urgently upon a certain matter. He is a young Chinese, not over twenty-three or twenty-four." She paused.

"Would it be possible for you to determine his whereabouts for me, if he is in Chicago?"

Wah Hung Fung looked at her for a long time, under which scrutiny she grew visibly restless. At last he spoke: "Li Ling Lee, you say?"

She nodded.

"Why, yes, madam. I can find him for you quickly if it is so that he really came to Chicago. What time to-morrow would you wish to know?"

"As early as possible," she responded.

Wah Hung Fung studied her a little more intently. "Then if you will return to-morrow at nine in the morning," he said, "I will see that Li Ling Lee's whereabouts are given to you if they are known at all to the majority of his countrymen here." He rose and clapped his hands. The silent Celestial reappeared. "Show this lady out, Chang."

Almost before she knew it, Sadie found herself out on the steps of the brownstone house with the stained-glass doors, and as she swung down to her waiting cab she gave vent to a little laugh of satisfaction. "I'm playing it right," she said to herself. "I'm on the track, all right, all right!" And she jumped into the cab with far more spirit than she had jumped out.

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH WAH HUNG FUNG OF CHINATOWN HOLDS COURT OF A SORT

PROMPTLY at nine o'clock next morning Sadie Hippolyte was back at No. 1950 Archer Avenue. Almost before her finger had touched the bronze push button the door swung open, revealing the silent servant of the previous night. "We wait for you," he announced quietly. "Step in the same room, please."

Sadie crossed the entrance chamber and passed into the same room that she had entered the night before, wondering what the pronoun "we" stood for. Suddenly Wah Hung Fung as elaborately garbed as on the last occasion, only in a different costume this time, appeared through the tiny door to the right and dropped into a chair.

"Good morning, madam. I have found for you what you wish." He paused. "But you have not yet done me the honor of giving me either your name or your reasons for this investigation. May I, madam, have some information?"

The woman twisted in her chair. She did not exactly like this turn to the situation. "Well," she said at length reluctantly, "my name is Sadie Hippolyte. I own a rooming house in the cheaper part of Cleveland. There were two Chinese living at my house, of which one was—well—somewhat attached to me. His name was Mr. Wong Kwei. He died in my place. This Li Ling Lee lived there also.

"Reverting again to Mr. Wong," she continued, "he told me before he died that I could have something of his to remember him by after he was gone—a tiny green jade hand which he carried in his baggage. But after he died, and I inspected the baggage, the trinket he mentioned was missing. Li Ling Lee had roomed with Mr. Wong for a while

before the latter got so low in his health, and I am sure that Li Ling Lee stole the tiny green-jade hand.

"In fact," she went on, "Li Ling Lee stole one or two personal articles of mine, which really do not matter, for I found them later hidden among his own belongings. I am anxious, however, to have that keepsake given me by Mr. Wong, and having had to come to Chicago on other business decided to look up Li Ling Lee and ask him if he would sell the trinket back to me." She paused. "That's all, Mr. Wah."

"I see." Wah Hung Fung was lost in contemplation of something. "I have investigated," he said at length, "and have found that Li Ling Lee is working here in Chinatown at Quien Quong's chop-suey restaurant on West Twenty-second Street. I have summoned him here. He is now waiting in the library." He clapped his hands, and the servant appeared. "Chang, open the library door and call Li Ling Lee in here."

The servant stepped to the other door of the room, turned a huge copper key, and swung it open. "Come, Li Ling Lee," he called, and there appeared in the opening an almond-eyed Celestial, staring out at the woman in the larger room.

He was the first to speak. "Hello, Missee Hiplollytee. What you doee in Chicago?"

"Hello, Li!" she said easily. "I was in town and thought I would look you up. In fact, Li, I came to buy back from you that little green jade hand with the six fingers that you thought Mr. Wong didn't want. How much do you want for it, Li?"

Li shuffled uneasily on his feet, but said nothing.

Wah Hung Fung spoke sternly to him in Chinese. "Did you steal that green jade hand? Tell me the truth now, you dog!"

Li Ling Lee answered sullenly: "Wong was a sick man, Honorable Wah. I didn't think he wanted it. It was noth-

ing—just a tiny piece of dappled jade not so big as a li-chee nut. I liked it, and just took it."

Wah Hung Fung looked toward the woman. "He took it," he announced sternly. He turned to the Chinese. "Now answer the lady. What are you going to do about it?"

Li shuffled uneasily upon his feet. "You wantee gleen-jade han' for Mist' Wong?" he asked, as though sparring for time.

"Yes. I'll be glad to pay you for it, Li. I thought a good deal of Mr. Wong. And he is dead."

"Dead! Wong Kwei dead!" The Chinese shook his head in doleful amazement. He paused a long time. The silence was intense. At last he spoke again: "Missee Hiplollytee, I never takee gleen jade han' if I thinkee you want it. But yes; I takee it before I come Chicago. I gettee job in Quien Quong's restaulant as cook. Las' Tluesday night, lot p'leece officers come upstairs. I hear 'em say Quien Quong: 'We wantee speak Li Ling Lee w'at come f'um Clevelan'. He got go by p'leece station.'

"I get so scared," Li went on. "I thinkee first, Wong Kwei telegraph Chicago and say I steal um lil gleen-jade hand. Before they gettee back in kitchen, I tossee gleen-jade hand in big pan chop suey I jus' make. They say: 'Li Ling Lee, comee by station. You livee in Clevelan', didn't you?' And then I knowee sure they wantee me for steal Wong's gleen-jade hand. They takee me to station, an' I say I not knowee anything, for why I arrest.

"They search me and lookee me over," Li continued, "and find I gottee only one leg; other leg made cork when cut off by Chicago stleet cars. They all laugh likee good joke and say, 'Gettee hell out o' here,' and give me shove. And I all flee again and not even hear about gleen jade hand. And so I comee back to Quien Quong's and go work again."

A long pause followed his odd story. Then the woman snapped suddenly, tensely:

"So—so the police were after you, eh?" She wrinkled up her brows and a pained look flashed across her cold, keen eyes. "But—but what became of the jade hand? You recovered it, Li?"

"Reclover it?" The Chinese appeared to consider her words. "I not get him again, Missee Hiplollytee, because he gone in bowl of chop suey what somebody eat. He gone when I get back. That all I know."

Her face was the picture of despair. "You are telling the truth, Li? Was that green-jade hand gone when you came back? I'll pay you twenty-five dollars cash for that hand, if you have it."

Now the Chinaman's face became the picture of despair. "Twenty-fli dollar!" he wailed. "Oh—terrible thing! But the hand gone, Missee Hiplollytee. He gone for good."

"Was the place full of people when you left?" asked Wah Hung Fung in Chinese.

"Nobody was there, Honorable Wah," returned Li in the same tongue.

"And who was there when you returned?"

"Nobody was there then, Honorable Wah," said the culprit.

Wah clapped his hands. The servant Chang appeared. "Get Quien Quong at once, Chang, and bring him here without fail."

A long silence followed in which all three people sat and studied their own footgear. At length Chang, the servant, appeared in the doorway, a fat, oily, squat-faced Chinese puffing along behind him. The latter, conducted into the room where the inquiry was taking place, waited deferentially until the bigger man spoke in the Oriental tongue:

"Quien Quong, think back carefully. When Li Ling Lee here was taken to the police station the other night, nobody was in your restaurant, and nobody was there when Li came back. But was there any one there while he was gone?"

"I remember well, Honorable Wah," said the fat-faced Celestial. "One man—a young man—a man not dressed very well, Honorable Wah, came in. He ate ravenously; ate all there was in the bowl. He was not even clean shaved, Honorable Wah, and had I had my after-theater crowd I would not even have served him. But—" He made an expressive gesture with his pudgy hands.

Wah Hung Fung turned to Sadie Hippolyte and translated the story Quien Quong had just told him.

She sighed a long, bitter sigh. "Then nothing more can be done," she said quietly. "The customer, whoever he was, got the trinket—and the thing is gone for good." She bowed to Wah Hung Fung. "I thank you most deeply, Mr. Wah, for your efforts in this matter."

He also rose and bowed politely. "Say not so, Madam Hippolyte. You are more than welcome." He turned to Chang. "Show the lady out."

Outside on the sidewalk the lady looked nervously at her wrist watch. Its hands pointed to nine-twenty in the morning. She reflected for a few seconds. "The Cleveland noon papers close at ten o'clock in the morning, and the Chicago papers must do the same. So I've still got time to make to-day's issues."

She stepped into the taxicab. "Drive me immediately to each of the evening papers in turn," she said hurriedly, "and after that the morning papers. And make speed. I must visit each of the evening papers before ten o'clock. Hurry, please!"

The driver slammed the door and shot out of Chinatown, across the dingy streets between Twenty-second and Twelfth, and drew up in front of the *Daily News* office in its huge castle-like building on the river. There the woman got out and, working feverishly with pen and ink at the classified-advertisement counter, wrote out the following advertisement which she marked for a week's continuous insertion in the personal columns:

Personal: Will the party dining in chop-suey restaurant on West 22nd Street Tuesday night return ornamental keepsake found in bowl of chop suey and receive reward of fifty dollars? Apply immediately to Room 771, Ontario Hotel.

From the *Daily News* she drove in turn to the *Evening Journal*, the *Times* and the *Evening American*, inserting in each place the same advertisement. This done, she canvassed the morning papers, again making the insertion and paying for a week's continuous run of the copy in each and every daily. After this was accomplished it was noontime, and she went back to the Ontario Hotel where she sat down to wait and wonder and ponder, puzzling as to whether her desperate attempts to secure the green jade hand were destined to failure or success.

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH CABLEGRAMS COME FROM FAR-OFF PEIPING

AFTER Sadie Hippolyte had withdrawn from the house, Wah Hung Fung nodded curtly to Quien Quong. "That's all," he said. "You may go, Quien."

A moment later he was alone with Li Ling Lee. He spoke, curiously, in Chinese: "Li Ling, what sort of a man was this Wong Kwei who lived with you in this lady's rooming house in Cleveland?"

"He was a young man, Honorable Wah; not so much older than I. Very sad he was, and never did he talk much about himself or his ancestors. He was sick most of the time, and much worse when I left Cleveland."

Under half-closed eyes Wah Hung Fung studied the younger Chinese for a moment; then he asked abruptly: "And is this all the police said to you when they found that you had an artificial leg: 'Get out of here?' "

Li Ling Lee fidgeted a few seconds before he answered. "Honorable Wah, they did say also: 'He's not the man. He lived there all right, but it's the other one. It—' " He stopped short, his emotionless face breaking for a bare second into a look of intelligence. "Could—could it be, Honorable Wah, that it was Wong Kwei they wanted?"

"Perhaps," said the older Chinese reflectively. "Perhaps." He paused. "Just what sort of a green-jade trinket was this, Li, which you appropriated without permission?"

"It was just a tiny hand with six fingers, Honorable Wah, not weighing so much as a li-chee nut, but most delicately carved, and with a tiny thread of gold around its index finger which pointed, pointed as though at some invisible person. Just a piece of carving in our Chinese jade, Honorable Wah, and not worth so much as a dollar in this American money."

"I see. And it had six fingers upon it, you say?"

Li Ling nodded. "Yes, Honorable Wah; five fingers and a thumb."

"You may go, Li Ling. That is all."

He went to the front door himself and let the Celestial out. But as soon as the door was closed he clapped his hands sharply together, and Chang appeared as though by magic.

"Chang, follow this fellow Li Ling Lee," he said. "I have particular reasons for wanting to know where he goes and what he does. He is a trickster and a thief of the worst kind—he has absolutely no moral fiber whatever. Go—and keep behind him for the balance of the day."

Chang, slipping into a European coat and soft hat, hurried out after the departing Li Ling Lee, and Wah, from behind the intricate bits of colored glass making up the gorgeous front windows, watched the servant depart. Then he went back to the big room and dropping into his teakwood chair fell to thinking deeply upon the matter which had just intruded itself into his quiet.

At length, as though by a sudden thought, he stepped into the huge library adjoining this room, and from the thousands of European and Chinese books took down one massive volume. Opening it leisurely, he displayed to his gaze heavy, soft, cream-colored paper covered with thousands of black Chinese hieroglyphics on every page. The title of the work, translated into English, would have read literally: "The Artists and Jade Workers of China: Their Honorable Lives."

He turned over the pages slowly, reading snatches here and there of the lives of various illustrious Chinese artists and artisans, and as he proceeded the perplexed look on his face faded and gave way to a look that showed only too plainly that some hazy recollection was crystallizing into distinctness.

He turned the pages more rapidly now, and at last

stopped as he came to one page in particular. "I was right," he murmured slowly. "I knew that far back in my mind was some memory of an episode in which six fingers figured. The six fingers were the one illuminating clew to the recollection. Indeed, a true reader records all he peruses among his treasures—for the mind is but another storehouse for the contents of books."

He bent his attention to the several vertical columns of hieroglyphics which he had found by patient search. They were in flowery Chinese, but literally translated read:

> Kang-Tse: A well-known worker in jades during the Meng dynasty, one of the three brothers, Kang-Tse, Teng-Tse, and Ko-Tse, all illustrious artists. It was Kang-Tse who was delegated to carve the famous fresco work around the throne room in the imperial palace of the first emperor of the Meng dynasty, Meng Hoang-Ti.
>
> This entire work of carving, which required over ten years, was done entirely in green jade. Kang-Tse, in addition to being an illustrious artist, bore six fingers on his right hand. And it is said that his suicide came directly from the fact that he fell in love with O Lia Meng, Hoang-Ti's only daughter, and presented her with a jade token consisting of a tiny hand with six fingers, as an indication that he was offering her his hand.
>
> The beautiful O Lia Meng, however, sent back his hand, and Kang-Tse killed himself three moons later. He left only the two brothers, Teng-Tse and Ko-Tse, each distinguished in the arts, but neither marked with six fingers.

Wah Hung Fung closed the huge Chinese book with a snap and sat thinking deeply. "Strange, strange, what she wants with that simple six-fingered hand! And who is Wong Kwei, who lived at her establishment in Cleveland? Undoubtedly either a descendant of Teng-Tse or Ko-Tse. But why should—"

He sat for a moment longer and then, as though by a sudden determination, stepped over to an inlaid desk and, taking up a very American-looking cablegraph blank and an especially American steel pen, wrote out the following brief message. It was addressed to the chief official of the police system, Peiping, China, and read:

Cable me immediately names of present oldest male descendants living to-day of illustrious Teng-Tse and Ko-Tse of the Meng dynasty. WAH HUNG FUNG.

"Fortunate it is," he said to himself with a grim smile, "that the descendancy of all famous Chinese artists, philosophers, and sages are kept to date in the archives at old Peking, now called Peiping. That quaint custom is most fortunate. And indeed I cannot help but believe this is a deep matter, a serious matter, a matter into which Wah Hung Fung must look. It can hardly be otherwise. The woman—" And he fell to thinking again of his recent feminine visitor's strenuous attempts to regain a token which intrinsically was worth little or nothing.

At last, however, he came from his abstraction, and summoning another servant from the lower regions gave him the yellow blank with instructions where to take it and what to do with it. The man, evidently familiar with the handling of such things as cablegrams to Peiping, departed from the house, and Wah Hung Fung was left again with his thoughts.

All the rest of that day he did but little, at times napping briefly, at other times seeing a few Chinese who came to him with various complaints such as nonpayment of wages, and in still another case calling in all parties involved in an alleged injustice and holding a sedate trial which ended in a settlement. He ate his lunch abstractedly, and in the afternoon slept peacefully for several hours.

At night, however, a cigarette-smoking, blue-clad youth with a blue and white envelope in his hand came up to the door of the Archer Avenue house and rang the bell. Wah himself, in the absence of Chang, answered the door and took in the message. Then he went back to his library of hundreds of volumes and opened the envelope curiously. Its contents, like the original message, were in English, and they read:

Teng-Tse branch died with Teng-Tse's son. Ko-Tse represented to-day by Foy Yuh Yuan, for thirty years Chinese consul to San Francisco. Foy Yuh Yuan has one American-born son now living there, Charles Foy, of San Francisco.

A long whistle escaped the elderly Celestial. He read and reread the cablegram and then sat for a long time thinking. "It was he, then," he commented tensely to himself. "That is exactly what the police meant when they threw Li Ling Lee out of their station. They thought he was possibly Foy, but found by his cork leg he could not be. So much for that. Very, very good, thus far!"

As fast as he could, he made his way upstairs to an Americanlike business office, fitted with a modern portable telephone, a mahogany flat-top desk, a swivel chair, and a filing cabinet. There he dropped into the chair and fell to turning over the pages of the classified directory until he came to the heading "Curio Shops."

"It might easily be," he said thoughtfully to himself, "that this poorly dressed man who found it may have sold it again. Surely—there is no telling!"

He found six names altogether, under the heading "Curio Shops." In turn he called each of them up on the telephone, asking whether they had a certain article, a tiny green-jade hand with six fingers on it, and informing them he would like to buy it. Each—up to the fourth—told him that they had nothing like that in stock, but offered him as a substitute plenty of trinkets made of green jade. But the fourth, by name Casimer Jech, informed him that he had just such a trinket and that its price was five dollars.

When he hung up the receiver Wah Hung Fung sat thinking. Again he pictured the woman who had called there that morning, her pretty face hard and without conscience. "Most strange," he reflected, "that she has not done as I, and located its whereabouts. Surely she has not given up the pursuit merely on account of Li Ling Lee's story. Perhaps—"

An evening issue of the *Daily News* lying on the desk attracted his attention, and almost as an experiment he turned to the personal columns. His breath left him in a little guttural grunt of satisfaction when he came to the first insertion in that brief column, just preceding the help-wanted advertisements. It ran:

> Personal: Will the party dining in chop-suey restaurant on West 22nd Street Tuesday night return ornamental keepsake found in bowl of chop suey and receive reward of fifty dollars? Apply immediately to Room 771, Ontario Hotel.

He smiled. "So that was her method. And what results will it bring her?"

He lost no time, however. Stepping to his sleeping room he put off his indoor cap and his rich garments and donned an American costume. Then he left the house and cutting over to West Twenty-second Street, where his passage was followed by bows of hundreds of his yellow-skinned people, he followed an eastward progress until he was far beyond the C. R. I. & P. viaduct and out of Chinatown altogether.

Here he continued in the same direction, and at last reached State Street which he crossed. Now his eyes fell upon a sign flapping in the wind, and stopping in front of the low store which bore the sign, Wah Hung Fung inspected it. It was a curio store bearing a single number. In the window were articles galore, of all descriptions, and down close to the plate glass was a red-velvet tray bearing quaint gold rings, opals of various sizes and colors, and a tiny green-jade hand with a ring of gold around its pointing forefinger.

He made his way inside. A man with a long nose and bushy gray hair came up to the counter and snapped on the overhanging cluster of lights. "I am rather deaf," he explained, "and must watch the lips of my customers in order to please them in their wants. What can I do for you to-day?"

"I am the person who just spoke to you on the tele-

phone about the tiny six-fingered jade hand in your window. I—"

"You are Mr. Wah Hung Fung, the most influential personage in the Chinese section of the city," said the curio dealer. "I know you well, Honorable Wah, for I have done business here for twenty years or more. And you have been pointed out to me many times."

Wah Hung Fung scratched his chin, a pained expression dropping over his face. "You know me then? It is well." He paused, reflecting. "Speaking of the green-jade hand in your window, you purchased it from—whom?"

"From a young fellow who looked as though he needed cash," replied Jech curiously. "Nothing wrong, is there?"

"Yes; there is. I am sorry to inform you," went on Wah, "that that trinket was stolen. I have not come here to force you to give it back to the rightful owner, which you would have to do according to the American law. But I must insist emphatically that, pending some adjustment of matters, you withdraw it from your show window and lock it up in your safe where it will be neither on exhibition nor on sale. And unless you will agree to do this, I must call the nearest police officer and have the thing taken from you."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the proprietor, smiling. "Don't do that. I would give it up rather than have any muss like that. Stolen, eh? Well, the young scamp! He looked hungry and I thought I would help him out." He turned toward the show window. "Sentimental associations to the thing, are there, Mr. Wah, which make it valuable to some one?"

"I may say so—yes," said the Chinese. "You will do, as I suggest?"

"Surest thing you know!" Jech returned. "Wait!" He went to the right-hand show window and, climbing out over the trash, took the jade hand from the red-velvet tray, bringing it back into the store.

He stepped back into his rear office and Wah, from where he stood, could see the curio-shop owner swinging open the

door of an ancient battered safe and dropping the hand into one of a dozen wooden compartments built like drawers. A second later the safe door clanged shut, and the key turned in the lock. Wah Hung Fung had accomplished his errand.

"Let me know at the proper time," said the proprietor as he came back into the store, "what's wrong, and I'll gladly turn it over to the correct party. Not worth but a few dollars."

"I will do that," said Wah politely. "And remember, sir, under no condition whatever must you give it up or sell it without hearing from me. I may go so far as to say that to do so will involve you in grave legal difficulties." Then he departed from the store, leaving the other staring after him.

Outside Wah Hung Fung hurried off. But a short distance away he spoke half to himself, his colorless lips moving under his black mustache: "Had I purchased it from him, then would Wah Hung Fung have seemed deliberately to have conspired in that which looks far from good already. The fact that it belonged originally to one of Kang-Tse's brothers and that one of those brothers has a descendant, an American-born Chinese, Charles Foy, son of Foy Yuh Yuan, makes it plain that it must be connected in some way with that same Charles Foy, of San Francisco. Well enough!

"But the fact that Li Ling Lee was arrested shows plainly that the American police are far from asleep; that they are on the trail. So it is certainly not good for Wah Hung Fung to enter into things—yet. The green-jade hand is now no longer in the window, nor is it for sale, both of which are good. But how can it best be placed quickly in the hands of Wah Hung Fung where it will be safe—quite safe, entirely so? And also in such a way that even this man Jeeh cannot possibly know or prove where it has gone? Ah, there is the big question!"

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH MR. SILVERTHORNE MAKES A NEAT BARGAIN REGARDING HIS DAUGHTER IOLANTHE

IT was a bright sunny Thursday morning when Dirk Mattox locked up the door of his tiny offices in the Ellsworth Building and took the elevator to the street, where he boarded a street car and sat in a brown study all the way to South Park Way. There he proceeded straight to a splendid gray-stone house, with curved-glass bay windows and two potted palms out on the stone porch. He rang the bell as if in a hurry.

He waited anxiously, rumpling up his brown hair under his brown derby hat and staring unseeingly at the door panels through his steel-gray eyes.

Presently the door opened. A girl clad in a most charming morning gown of blue silk stood in the opening—a girl with hair done up in ringlets of jet, and with still darker eyes that captivated whoever gazed into their velvet depths.

"Well, Iolanthe, I've come exactly as I said I would. Is he in?"

The girl placed her finger on her lips and motioned Mattox to come inside. There, with a light touch on his arm, she led him into the parlor filled with blue-velour furniture and with a splendid baby-grand piano in the corner. Closing the big folding doors softly, she spoke:

"Yes, Dirk; he's in. But he's still in a blue, depressed mood—and—and, dear, I can't feel somehow that the time is propitious. He'll give you only the same answer he gave me."

Mattox smiled at her, patting her soft cheek; then the smile faded, a look of belligerency came into his gray eyes and his straight, firm jaw stiffened.

"But it's absolutely out of the question, Io, putting it off," he said firmly. "It's a confoundedly funny world if a man can't choose whom he is going to spend his life with, or if a girl can't do the same. Just because your father's alone and so absorbed in his own erratic avocation that he needs some one to look after him, is no reason why two other normal people should have to remain single. I don't care whether he is in a mood or not. Neither do I care what answer he gave you. He can tell me 'yes' or give me the straight reason why not." He paused. "And suppose his answer to my line of talk is 'no'? What then, honey girl?"

A look of pain crossed over Iolanthe's face. "Dear, don't speak of that possibility. He must say 'yes.' You don't—you can't realize what it is—how I feel for him, because he is my father; how I realize that to marry you and be happy I must do so with his permission; how it would spoil everything for me if I were to run off and break his heart. You must induce him in some way to say 'yes.' We must not even consider the 'no' possibility."

"Where is he now?" asked Mattox quickly. "In with his precious books as usual, I suppose?"

Iolanthe nodded.

"Any suggestions?" he inquired after a pause. "I'm going to talk straight from the shoulder to him, but if he's in a blue mood you probably know the psychology of that mood best. But I'm not going away before I do what I came to do—beard the lion in his den."

The girl shook her head dismally. "Dear, you know how anxious I am for that wonderful day when you and I shall be together—for always. I cannot tell you exactly how to handle him, but you must induce him to consent. As to his present mood, it is merely one of depression. For several days—ever since Monday morning, in fact—he's been moping in among his books in what we might call a blue funk. But he won't tell me what is wrong."

"I see." Mattox turned to the doorway. "Well, no matter."

With a cheerful backward nod at the girl who still stood undecidedly in the parlor, Mattox went down the hallway and tapped firmly on an oak door. A man with silver-gray hair and keen face, with gold-rimmed eyeglasses perched on the end of his nose, answered the door. He was clad in a faded-blue bathrobe, and on a wide library table inside the room were a number of ancient-looking volumes bound in faded leather, together with a dust cloth. A musty odor came from the doorway. Plainly, the bibliophile was gloating among his treasures.

The man in the door was the first to speak. "Morning, Mattox. Want to see Io, do you?"

"Morning, Mr. Silverthorne. No; I wanted to see you. I've already seen Iolanthe."

"Step in."

The room which Mattox entered was filled with shelves from ceiling to floor, and every shelf was packed to bulging with volumes that were not of the present age of civilization. Most of them were bound in leather so old that it was cracked and faded; some were paper-covered, and still others were cloth-covered books; all in all they comprised a hundred strange sizes and shapes. Among those lying on the library table was an ancient manuscript with gold-and-red initial letters and printing that smacked of Korea and India—at least of a copy of the Koran that Mattox once had seen.

The younger man dropped into a chair and turned his attention to Silverthorne, who took up a seat near him.

"Well, Mattox, what did you want to see me about? I've been dusting my big collection, and it surely takes a long time to go over it." A look of intense pride supplanted for an instant the depressed gaze in his keen eyes.

Mattox waited a moment before he spoke. "You can probably guess, Mr. Silverthorne, why I've come to you,"

he said at last. "You know now that Iolanthe and I want to get married. She wants me and I want her. That should be sufficient. She says, though, that she spoke of it to you, and that you put your foot down firmly and emphatically against it. What have you against me? I've invented the Mattox Noiseless Platen for typewriters, and I'm getting orders galore. I'm making good money now, so much so that I've even advertised for an office assistant already. I can take care of her in the right way. Then what have you against me?"

Silverthorne rose from his chair and paced up and down the room several times. Then he dropped into his seat again.

"Mattox, frankly, I've nothing against you," he replied. "But Iolanthe is the most precious thing I've got—more precious than my whole collection of old books which I wouldn't take any price for. I can't bear the thought of losing her. But it may be that I shall—if she wants to disobey me and run away and marry you. And that, I'm thinking, my little girl will never do."

Again he rose from his chair and took several more turns up and down the room. Then he resumed his seat for the second time and went on talking. "I suppose, though, Mattox," he continued, "that I've ultimately got to lose her. It's the law of nature. But one thing is certain. I'm not going to give my permission for her marriage until I get in her place one thing which to me is the next most precious thing in the world. Then I'll feel half compensated for her loss, at any rate."

He looked up and in his eyes was a strange, hungry light. "Mattox, you're young and keen and resourceful and energetic. Just suppose that I should say to you that if you got this one thing which would make my happiness complete, I would tell you and Iolanthe to go ahead and get married. Mattox, what would you do?"

"Do? I would manage to get it—if it was gettable."

"And if it wasn't?"

"But there's always some way to accomplish most anything." Mattox paused. "What is this thing that you want most in the world—for which you would be willing to say O. K. to Io and myself?"

"That thing, as you call it," said Silverthorne quietly, "is a certain Vindelinus de Spira—copy number two."

"Copy numb—oh, a book!" exclaimed Mattox, a light breaking in on him suddenly. "A book, eh? A Vindelinus de Spira? What is it, Mr. Silverthorne?"

The bibliophile gave another turn up and down the room, then he sat down again. "Mattox, I'll tell you the story, without any changes or embellishments. Then we'll see what you've got to suggest. Last week a book collection of some ignoramus out in Evanston—Samuel Hoggenheimer, the former brewery man, to be exact—was consigned to Snodgrass' auction rooms on Wabash Avenue to be auctioned off. Snodgrass knows nothing of books—of anything. He should be in the paving-block business. So much for that.

"On Saturday morning," he went on, "I dropped in and when looking over the volumes carefully came across nothing less than a copy of a certain Vindelinus de Spira, genuine to the core. On account of its long Latin title inside—'De Devinis Institutionibus Adversum Gentes'—the ignoramus who owned it had written on the cover the title "The Book of Genesis." And under that common title the book was listed in the auction catalogue. Reverting to its rarity again, there is but one like it in the world, and that copy is in the British Museum. This one has in it the Nepithomon, which is known to be missing from the British Museum copy. Mattox, I never dreamed that in my life the chance would come which might give to my collection the gem of all rare books, past and present. I—I was all a-tremble."

"And you bought it?" asked the younger man.

Silverthorne shook his head dolefully. "Unfortunately no. Without announcing my discovery to the world, I tried to ascertain something about buying some of the books ahead of time. But on account of certain legal aspects of the Hoggenheimer estate, an advertised auction had to take place, hence they were not allowed to sell them that way. I left the place, determined to bid in that 'Book of Genesis'—in reality the Vindelinus de Spira. Monday morning early I went back. And by Heaven"—he clenched his hands—"the book was gone! And in its place, the same number sticker on it, was a volume entitled "De Romanis," of which there is but one copy in Chicago. And that same copy has been offered to me on several occasions."

"Then there was a substitution," put in Mattox quickly. "And who originally owned this 'De Romanis'?"

"A man," went on Silverthorne, "with bushy-gray hair and a long nose had been in that auction room twice on Saturday afternoon looking over the books. That man I know well. He is the same individual, in fact, who three times tried to sell me his 'De Romanis' of which I already had a splendid copy. He is Casimer Jech, a curio specialist over at No. 14 East Twenty-second Street. There's the whole story."

Mattox thought for a moment before he spoke. "You say that the man who called twice at that place on Saturday afternoon, according to the clerk or someone had that identical description? Also that this Casimer Jech has offered you the 'De Romanis' himself? And that there are no other copies in Chicago?"

Silverthorne nodded. "Exactly."

"Then it's quite obvious that Jech lifted the Vindelinus before anybody else had a chance to announce its discovery." Mattox paused. "And you're the loser—or aren't you?"

"Certainly I am," snapped the book collector. "I would have succeeded in buying that thing in for a small amount

at the auction Monday morning, for no one else had recognized it at all. I was simply cheated out of my prize. Jech has stolen it. He has therefore stolen it from me. And I am the real victim of the theft."

Mattox wrinkled up his brows. He was puzzled at the peculiar ethical problem presented, yet he could see plainly as he analyzed it that Silverthorne had been the real victim of the substitution of the theft. "And what did you do, then, Mr. Silverthorne?" he asked.

"I went to Jech's and offered to buy it for a thousand dollars cash. He was interested, so much so that you could see the avarice standing out in his gray eyes; but he denied all knowledge of the Vindelinus, and even got tangled up when he tried to explain, and failed, as to why the 'De Romanis' was no longer in his stock.

"I'm practically broke, Mattox, so far as any more big purchases in rare books go," Silverthorne continued. "I've spent my pile in the game, but I don't regret it. I've got an annuity from my father's estate that will take care of Iolanthe and me—but no more money to plunge on rare volumes. My last thousand doesn't tempt him, and so it seems that I lose out. He's going to keep it in that old iron safe of his, the safe in which he keeps everything of value he has, the safe in which I've seen him put hundreds of rare curios and take hundreds more from it; and in the meantime he's going to investigate slowly and carefully until he finds somewhere in the world some one who'll give him the stupendous price the book can command. My book, confound his thieving soul! He's going to try to get rich on my book! And so he refuses to acknowledge possession or to give it up."

"Of course," declared Mattox, "if you spilled the truth to the police and had a legal search made in his safe, you would lose out yourself entirely, for the thing would be sued for by the trustees of the estate who would reap the profit that their ignorance let slip away from them."

Silverthorne nodded grimly. "Precisely. The book belongs to me by prior discovery. And Jech knows me well enough to realize that I'll say nothing to the police in the hope that I can personally get it from him. Jech is a psychologist. But I'm so crazy to have it, Mattox, that if I could only get my hands on it I would go myself to the trustees of the Hoggenheimer estate and spend the whole thousand in buying quit claims from every heir involved. In that way nobody would be wronged." He paused. "I would honestly do that, Mattox."

Mattox's face brightened. "That would be quite fair—more than fair," he said. A long pause followed. "Then I understand you to mean, Mr. Silverthorne, that if I could get this Vindelinus de Spira into your hands, you'd say O. K. to Iolanthe and me on our marriage? But that if I can't you're going to stand pat, refuse your permission and spoil everything?"

"That's what I'm going to do," said Silverthorne petulantly, resembling in his tone and attitude nothing so much as a spoiled child. "I want that Vindelinus as the crowning book of my collection. And I won't be happy without it. Get it for me in any way you see fit, and I'll give Iolanthe up, for I'll have some magnificent collection then."

He wrung his hands like a miser gloating over his gold. "But if you can't do that for me, Mattox, then don't expect me to be interested in *your* happiness. That's all."

Mattox sat back in his chair, thinking. He tapped nervously on the floor with his foot. Then he glanced at his watch. "What's the description of this book?" he asked suddenly. "And what's the address again of this fellow Jech?"

Silverthorne laughed a keen, mirthless laugh. "Don't worry about buying it from Jech with any money you've saved up. It won't work. He's out for big coin. As to the book itself, it's bound in old leather something of the shape and size of that one lying on the table there." He indicated

the volume he meant. As to Jech's number, it's No. 14 East Twenty-second Street." His face grew suddenly hopeful, a wild optimism reflecting from his eyes, "Have—have you got a plan of some sort?"

"No plan at all," replied Mattox quietly. "No plan at all, Mr. Silverthorne. But there's more than one way to skin a cat." He rose and turned to the library door. "And that's the best you'll do, is it, even for your own little girl's happiness?"

"I said it," returned the other irritably, morosely. "Get that Vindelinus for me, and I'll let Io go. Otherwise I'll just keep her myself."

Mattox bowed and walked out.

At the front door, Iolanthe appeared and looked questioningly up at him. He bent down and kissed her on the rosebud lips. "What did he say, Dirk?" she inquired tensely.

"I haven't time to tell you now," he said with his hand on the doorknob, "but, darling, he's given me a slim chance —a slim chance. But slim as it is, your happiness and mine is hanging on it." And with another kiss and a promise to call her up and see her the next night, his regular evening for visiting the South Park Way home, he left the house.

"The first thing to do," he told himself out on the sunny sidewalk, "is to see this fellow Jech and worm out of him just what sum he's holding the Vindelinus for. I've had an offer of two thousand five hundred dollars for my patent on the Mattox Noiseless Platen, and if it comes to a showdown I can sell out, buy the book, and go to work for some one else. Nothing matters if I can only have Io." And with undue haste he turned his footsteps toward the nearest car line.

CHAPTER XII

THE WOMAN IN THE BLACK VEIL

WITHOUT any clear conception in his mind as to what he was going to do, or exactly how he was going to do it, Mattox left the South State Street car at Twenty-second Street and began to scan the street numbers to the east for the sign of a curio shop.

He knew enough of Horatio Silverthorne to realize that the man was an extremist extraordinary on the matter of his precious books—his ancient books—his books in which no normal person could be interested for over ten minutes; so he was not altogether surprised that Silverthorne had made the strange proposition that he had. And if the securing of the Vindelinus de Spira meant the getting of Iolanthe—rather, the taking of her in such a way that her own conscience could not interfere with her peace of mind and happiness—then the Vindelinus de Spira must be obtained. That was plain.

Through an old sign creaking in the breeze, Mattox found Jech's place in short order, and still not realizing what steps he was going to take, he went slowly down the basement stairs and proceeded into the dark shop. He glimpsed an open door at the rear, and inside of it a sort of office fitted with a desk, a filing cabinet, and an iron safe, huge, massive, but radiating an atmosphere of antiquity as much as did the many other articles standing in the shop itself.

The office was lighted up by an incandescent bulb, and a man with bushy-gray hair and a long nose was sweeping out from under the old-fashioned safe as he entered. Mattox waited at the counter until the proprietor had wielded his long-handled brush carefully under the four short legs

of the safe and had in turn transferred the light dust into a pan.

Then Jech, with broom and dustpan in his hand, came forward and set them down. Pressing a button on the wall, an overhanging cluster of incandescents broke into a blaze, making Mattox's eyes blink with the bright light.

"Beg pardon," said the proprietor, "but I am very deaf. This—this light is so that I may watch my customers' lips. What can I do for you to-day, sir?"

"You deal in all sorts of curios, I believe," Mattox began, a little dubiously. "Do you deal in old books also?"

The proprietor nodded. "Indeed, yes. Everything and anything in the way of antiques. Anything in particular you would like in that line?"

"I am looking for a certain old book," said Mattox. "Or I am trying at least to ascertain the value of it."

"I have many old books," Jech informed him quietly, pointing at the long shelves filled with volumes which, in their antiquated leather bindings, much resembled those that adorned the copious shelves of Silverthorne's vast library. "And I am able in many cases to secure specimens which are not in my own stock."

"The book which I am trying to get," said Mattox, watching the other like a hawk, "is known as the Vindelinus de Spira, or—"

He stopped short, half amused, even in spite of the seriousness of the situation, at the look that swept over Jech's face. If he had had any doubts whatever as to Silverthorne's deductions they were swept away in a moment. At the very first mention of the Vindelinus. Jech started guiltily, a slight gasp slipped from his half-opened lips, he leaned forward and supported himself upon the counter, and almost mechanically looked back over his shoulder at the iron safe which stood in the partitioned-off office at the rear.

He caught himself almost as quickly as he had made the

guilty look over his shoulder, but too late. Mattox registered a few impressions at once in his own mind. "He's got it all right, and just as Silverthorne says, it's inside that old iron safe. A dead give-away."

At last Jech spoke. His voice was questioning, tense with curiosity: "My dear sir, what on earth makes you think you can secure a copy of the Vindelinus de Spira? Why, man, do you know anything about books at all? There's only one copy of that book in the world, and that one is in the British Museum at London, England." He paused. "Or perhaps you're rich, or your people are?" The last remark was made with some business shrewdness.

Mattox shook his head. "No; I'm not rich. And I have no people. I have come wholly on my own initiative, for I should simply like to have a copy of this book for reasons of my own. I hardly realized, however, that it possessed the value you suggest."

Jech leaned over the counter. "Say, who told you that Casimer Jech of No. 14 East Twenty-second Street could help you out on such a wild purchase? Did you come here on your own hook, or for some one else? Don't know a man named Silverthorne, do you?" he added casually. "He's another individual who seemed to think that Casimer Jech could get a genuine copy of the original Vindelinus de Spira for him. I declare, I don't understand why people come to me—unless perhaps I've got a bigger reputation in the curio field than I'm supposed to have."

Mattox heard him through, thoroughly cognizant that the man was lying. Jech's words were jerky and uneasy, his voice was artificial, his manner was quite different from what it had been when he had stepped forward to greet a casual customer.

When he finished Mattox spoke, trying out a new line of attack. "Yes; I admit I heard from a certain source, Mr. Jech, that you have a Vindelinus for sale. That source, as you surmised, was Mr. Horatio Silverthorne of No. 4010

South Park Way. He is certain that you have one or can get one for him." He was tempted to add: "And I know from your manner that you have the book itself," but did not do so.

"He didn't send me here to get it for him, however," Mattox went on. "He did inform me, though, that he would withdraw his objections to the marriage of his daughter and myself if I could manage to get a copy of the Vindelinus de Spira for his collection. If you have one or can get one, I'm here to do business. I'm the inventor of the Mattox Noiseless Platen for typewriters. I've been offered two thousand five hundred dollars cash for that patent. If I close on that deal and bring in the twenty-five hundred cash can you get me a Vindelinus?"

Jech laughed uneasily. "It evidently proved useless," he declared, "for me to talk to Silverthorne, and it's equally useless to talk to his emissaries. My dear sir, I have not *a* Vindelinus—nor *the* Vindelinus. I know nothing of it. Never heard that there was another one in existence. And I must request that you and he quit bothering me concerning it." He stopped and then added cautiously: "Is—is that the most you can raise on your patent?"

Mattox smiled at the subtle feeler. It was plain that Jech was simply holding the thing at a greater price. "It is the most I have ever been offered," he replied quietly. "But you say it is not sufficient."

"I merely say that I have not what you are trying to bargain for," corrected Jech. "Anything else you are interested in to-day? If so—"

His words were broken off by the slam of a taxicab door in front of the store, the opening of the front door of the shop, and the entrance of a lady whose thick black veil concealed her face completely. She stepped forward brusquely, and Mattox, seeing that a new customer had come and that he had failed on the only tack he had tried to pursue, nodded to Jech and turned to the door.

"Very well," he said. "See you at some later date." And he withdrew from the counter to give his place to the lady who had just come.

He left the store, but outside, instead of leaving the district, he stepped into a doorway at the side of the shop—a doorway which led to a cheap rooming house upstairs and adjoining. And, biting off the end of a cigar, he fell to reflecting unpleasantly upon the results he had obtained.

Jech had the stolen Vindelinus—the Vindelinus de Spira which by right of prior discovery belonged to his potential father-in-law, Horatio Silverthorne. The manner of the curio-shop owner was equally damning as the facts which Silverthorne had outlined. The twenty-five-hundred dollars which Mattox had been recently offered for his patent, and which he would gladly have given up in order to get Iolanthe, had not tempted the curio dealer in the least.

Whereupon he fell to wondering if the latter were holding the stolen Vindelinus for some collector who was very wealthy, or if possibly he expected the visit of an agent from some foreign or Eastern collector. But the book was valueless to Jech so long as it could be proved that he had stolen it; and Silverthorne's testimony, together with the testimony of people who had viewed the volumes in the dead Evanstonian's library, would prove that this same book had once occupied a position in that collection.

Also the testimony of the purchaser who had received a copy of "De Romanis" with the words "The Book of Genesis" written on the cover, would add to the chain of facts against Jech. Could it be, then, that Jech was not only quite assured in his own mind that Silverthorne would say nothing, but that he was confident also that the bibliophile would manage to raise a huge sum of money from some source to buy it with?

Mattox's thoughts were interrupteed by the sound of heated words coming from the inside of the shop close by the doorway in which he stood. He could distinguish no

words; only the gruff tones of the curio dealer mingling with the shrill feminine ejaculations of a woman—of the veiled woman who had entered the place. The driver of the taxicab was looking curiously, uneasily, down toward the basement shop, and Mattox strained his ears to try to learn what the commotion was about. But he could not make out a word.

Suddenly, however, the door of the shop opened and the veiled woman stepped forth, her hand on the knob. Mattox, standing in the adjacent doorway with his unlighted cigar in his fingers, could see her bosom heaving with anger, could almost sense the gleaming angry eyes beneath the heavy black veil. She stood for a second at the open door, then spoke back apparently to Jech who had come part way to the front of the shop, his mild expostulations faintly combating the vitriolic sentences which came from her lips.

"I know well that it's stolen," she flung furiously at him, "but you're a fool not to put a price on it. I've got money, I tell you. But you're a fool, and I'll make it my business to make you sorry for it. Locked in the safe, is it, and you won't even let me have a look at it? All right, my man! I'm going straight to see the person now who double-crossed me. And be careful that you keep it right in that safe until I return. We'll see who's playing in this game, and what their motives are."

With that she flung the door furiously shut and walked out to the taxicab. "Drive me to No. 1950 Archer Avenue," she snapped crossly. "And hurry up, too, if you want your pay."

CHAPTER XIII

SOME FACTS IN A NUTSHELL

AS the taxicab shot west on Twenty-second Street and disappeared around the corner of State Street, Dirk Mattox stared after it with ill-concealed amazement. The woman's significant words burned themselves into his brain. She knew well that "it" was stolen. Jech was a fool not to put a price on it. It was locked in the safe. Jech wouldn't even let her see it. She was double-crossed. Jech should be careful to keep it right in that safe until she returned. It! There was one thing, Mattox knew beyond doubt, that Jech had in that safe; something which he was holding mysteriously; something for which no price thus far offered seemed to be adequate; something which had been stolen. And that something was the Vindelinus de Spira.

The taxicab had vanished completely around the corner when Dirk Mattox came out of his daze and ran after it, his unlighted cigar still clutched in his fingers. When he reached State Street, the cab was far down the street, evidently making for the junction with Archer Avenue. So he slowed up, panting, wondering if he were making a fool of himself or what. But the woman's angry words came back to him again with startling force. Was she an agent—a collector—who was involved in the matter of *it*—the stolen Vindelinus de Spira? Indeed, it looked very much as though Horatio Silverthorne and Dirk Mattox were not the only disappointed purchasers of old books in Chicago.

Standing there, Mattox saw the taxicab swing over on the diagonal thoroughfare, Archer Avenue. The number the woman had given the chauffeur—1950—was still ringing in his ears, and he realized for the first time that he knew her destination. Whereupon a sudden overpowering

desire filled him to know something more about No. 1950 Archer Avenue and its occupants.

He thrust his hands into his pockets and started west on Twenty-first Street, knowing that far to the west Archer Avenue cut all the cross streets in that part of the city. When he reached the intersection twenty minutes later, he found that he was in the 2100's; so he bent his footsteps back along the city's famous diagonal thoroughfare and soon was in the 1900's.

He was in the right block, he noted, for the taxicab was waiting in front of a comfortable-looking brownstone house, and as he came nearer he saw that over the vestibule of the residence was a beautiful green-silk flag with a gold-embroidered Chinese dragon on it, and that its ornamental glass windows held most intricately built Chinese patterns in them.

He walked slowly by, averting his face as he passed the taxicab driver, who, however, was quite absorbed in the contemplation of what appeared to be a mechanical cigarette lighter. On Mattox went, past several dingy houses, and he noted that the first three persons he passed were all members of the Celestial race. Then he knew that he was in either the outskirts or else the residential section of Chicago's Chinatown, which must lie around to the south where the diagonal street cut into West Twenty-second. A fourth yellow-skinned Oriental shuffling past, Mattox stopped him. The Chinese stared blankly up at him.

"Charlie, who lives in that brown-stone house back there?" He pointed at it. "See where I mean?"

"Brownee house, eh?" The Chinese grinned. "Live in brown house Wah Hung Fung, bigee man in Chinatown; bigee king." He made an impressive gesture with his hands much as a fisherman does when describing a fish that has got away. "He muchee wise man. He educlated. He big judge. Gotee lots money, gotee lots blooks—hlundeds and hlundeds of blooks—old blooks an' new blooks. He lead

Englise, Flench, and Germin. Bigee leader of blooks. He much wise man."

"Lots of books, eh?" Mattox frowned. "Thanks, Charlie." He tossed the Celestial a quarter, then wended his way on a fraction of a block. At the first corner he stopped and reflected. "Lots of books—hundreds and hundreds of books, eh? Lots of money. Wise man. Lots of books—new and old. Reads English, French, and German."

A low whistle escaped him. "So this Wah Hung Fung, big Chinatown man, owner of hundreds of books, old and new, and this veiled woman have had a row of some sort upon the matter of the Vindelinus that Jech has lifted. And Jech won't admit he's got it. Has Jech made a deal with the Chinaman? There's the big question. But how does the woman have so much inside information?"

He thought for several minutes. "The Chinese 'bigee man' has double-crossed her all right, all right. Could she be an agent for some one else, or is she in this book game for herself? Who is she anyway?"

He shook his head disconsolately at the tangle of questions for which no answer could be framed, and remembering a call that had to be made on a prospective customer to the west of the Loop boarded a street car and left the region entirely, his thoughts still revolving dizzily about some scheme either for getting the Vindelinus or for getting Iolanthe without the Vindelinus. But the car to which he transferred happened to be a Halsted Street car, and near the heart of the city it passed a cheap hostelry with the word "Star" out in front of it and a crowd of ill-dressed men loafing about on the sidewalk. A sudden conscience-stricken feeling crept over Mattox, with the result that he rose and pressed his finger on the stop button.

"I ought to be ashamed of myself," he said to himself, "that I didn't call on that poor devil sooner. I promised him I would—and I haven't done it. Well, I'll make up for it now."

Soon he was inside the Star Hotel, standing in a cheap parlor which contained a red-plush sofa that sagged in the middle, a cheap counter, a battered brass cuspidor, and a torn, ink-stained register. A bedraggled woman in faded calico directed him to No. 414, fourth floor, when he asked for Mr. Luke McCracken, and he was soon climbing up through dark halls that reeked with odors ranging from gin and cigarettes to surreptitiously cooking vegetables.

At the door of No. 414 he knocked. A bed spring creaked. The door swung open a foot or so. In the opening stood a short stocky man, clad in a blue-serge suit, with several days' growth of beard on his face, and in his eyes a smoldering bitterness and hardness that was far from lost on Mattox, standing in the hallway.

The occupant of No. 414 was the first to speak. "C'me in, Dirk. C'm in. Glad to see you. Thought you'd forgot Luke."

Mattox entered the tiny room, furnished with an iron bed and the cheapest of furniture, its one window looking out on an ugly alley. "No, Luke," he said. "I didn't forget you. Simply had a lot of things on my mind and kept putting it off. Thought, too, that maybe you had left the Star Hotel by this time. It was a couple of days or more ago that you called me up and told me that your sentence was over."

He dropped into a chair. The short stocky man sat on the bed, and at once fell into such an attitude of profound dejection that Mattox studied him curiously, worriedly, wondering what could be the matter.

"I suppose," Mattox ventured after the silence had begun to be disquieting, "that you're feeling rather bitter, Luke, after putting in nearly four years in that place? Why, man, it was a shame! That night we met on the Clark Street Bridge and talked over the old days of Illinois Street, *my* watch was right and so was *I*. You couldn't have blown the Hempstead safe out near the South Shore Country Club. But my testimony simply couldn't swing the

case for you against the rotten facts rigged up against you."

The ex-cracksman did not speak for a moment; and when he did, his voice was lifeless, dull, and dead. "Dirk, ol' boy, o' course they jobbed me. But I admit I ain't got no right to be sore on 'em—account o' that. My life, Dirk, ain't been spotless, an' I been mixed up in sev'ral deals before that there episode what has probably earned me all I got. But I was playin' the game straight, and would have kept on doin' so, at the time they pinched me. Anyway they jugged me and I might as well call it quits in spite o' the fact that I was framed. Enough for that.

"But somethin' has happened since," he went on, "what has took all the life, all the ambition, out o' me, Dirk. I come out o' that Joliet State hotel resolved to play straight an' square in the game f'r all time. An' now I'm sittin' in this two-by-four hole here day after day, livin' on the ten they give me, hatin' the whole push, and wondering why the world kicks a guy that's down." He lapsed into a silence, his chin fell despondently on his chest, and he studied his toes sullenly.

"Why, Luke," broke in the younger man, "what's wrong, old fellow? Of course you're going to go straight. What's wrong?"

"Nothin'. Nothin' at all," said the stocky man, as though disliking to discuss the subject at all. "Le's drop it." He paused. "An' tell me, Dirk, what's been goin' on in your life since I been up the river. Married yet?"

A shadow crossed Mattox's face. "Married? No; not yet, Luke. Nothing much has happened to me. I invented a patent on typewriters a year ago, and started marketing it myself. Things are just beginning to look up for me. As to being married, Luke, I'm liable not to be at all. You see the girl's father won't give his permission and she hates to take the serious step without it. That's the history of my life while you've been—away."

Luke McCracken appeared only half to hear what was said. Mattox studied him with growing perplexity, wondering how much of the man's dejection was due to his incarceration the justice of which McCracken himself tacitly admitted.

After a while the ex-cracksman spoke, a little absently: "Why won't the old man give her up, Dirk? You're clean an' straight. Hasn't learned, has he, that you growed up on Illinois Street?"

Mattox shook his own head slowly. He was now the one to feel and show his despondency. "No; nothing against me there, Luke. The old man is a bug on books. He's got a collection of several thousand. And I can't say he has definitely refused to give her up. But there's a certain book which was practically stolen from him through a series of peculiar chances. That book is in the old-fashioned safe of a basement curio dealer named Casimer Jech at No. 14 East Twenty-second Street. The fellow Jech denies he knows anything about it, but he shows by his every action that he's got it tight in his safe, and he's left a trail back of him as broad as—as a river. He won't sell it back to the man he's practically stolen it from, and he won't even admit he's got it.

"The girl's father," he went on, "tells me that if I get that old leather-bound book I can take his daughter. There's the whole thing in a nutshell, Luke. I've offered the confounded crook two thousand five hundred dollars—the girl's father has offered him a thousand—but the fellow doesn't budge." He clenched his fingers. "By Heaven, I would like to see him get it in the neck!"

CHAPTER XIV

WHAT THE MORNING PAPER SAID

AT the mention of an old-fashioned safe and a basement curio store, the man on the bed appeared to be somewhat interested. He looked up, and his dejected eyes were suddenly keen and comprehending. "Why don't your girl's old man put the cops wise and make the guy on East Twenty-second Street open up the strong-box?"

Mattox shook his head slowly. "It's a peculiar situation, Luke. You see my girl's father would have succeeded in buying the thing at an auction for an absurd price, for he was smart enough and deeply versed enough in his art to recognize the value of the thing when it was entered under another title by the ignoramuses who made up the catalogue. But this fellow Jech got there ahead of him, and instead of playing square by keeping the secret and bidding openly for it, he lifted the book and substituted another that exactly resembled it.

"You can readily see," Mattox continued, "that it really belongs to my potential papa-in-law by the right of prior discovery, but what good does that do when it's locked in the fellow Jech's safe? If we let a peep out of our mouths, the whole cat will be out of the bag, and the news will go flashing around that a genuine Vindelinus de Spira—that's the name under which it appears that books put out by this old book maker of the middle ages are classed—was stolen. Then Jech will lose it, but worse still my prospective father-in-law will never be able to buy one page of it, let alone the whole thing."

The ex-cracksman was silent for a moment on the bed. His breath was coming a little faster. At last he looked up, and the gleam in his formerly sodden, discouraged eyes was more pronounced than ever.

"Dirk, I'm goin' to ask you a question what I wouldn't dare to ask anybody else on earth," he said. "I had a dirty trick done me when I got out o' th' pen. Society owes me a little debt—and society is goin' to pay that there debt before I goes straight again. Dirk, what would you pay if that there Vindelinus de Sparrow was to fall into your hands?"

Mattox leaned forward in his chair, puzzled. "You don't mean—"

"I mean nothin' an' anything," interrupted McCracken coldly. "I asked you what you'd pay if that curio crook was forced to disgorge?"

"Why, Luke, I would—I would pay a thousand dollars cash. But who would I pay it to? Who—"

"Listen," interrupted the other. "Would you pay three hundred an' twelve dollars an' sixty-six cents?"

"Three hundred and twelve dollars and sixty-six cents," repeated Mattox unbelievingly. "Three hundred and—why, Luke, I would pay pretty nearly all I could raise or borrow for that book. I would even sell my patent in order to put that Vindelinus into old man Silverthorne's hands and get him to say O. K. to my request to take his little girl. It belongs to him anyway. And I would—"

"But you ain't answered my question," broke in McCracken impatiently. "Would you pay anybody three hundred an' twelve dollars an' sixty-six cents for that Vindelinus de Sparrow? Answer just yes or no."

"Why, Luke, I would—"

"Yes or no?"

"Yes. You bet your life I would!" declared Mattox quickly. "But, Luke, you don't mean that you would—"

"Listen!" said the ex-cracksman wearily. "Society has done me a dirty trick. Three year an' nine months I worked my nails off daytimes in that pen for nothin'—and over half the time I worked nights on the extra machine-shop work f'r around fifteen cents an hour. That way I got me

together a roll to buy a little cigar store what's still waitin' for me here in Chicago. Three hundred an' twelve bucks an' sixty-six cents I saved up, penny by penny, livin' day an' night behind stone walls an' iron bars.

"And the whole damned roll, Dirk, was lifted off o' me by a honored member of this so-called society while I was asleep on th' electric train comin' from Joliet. I want nothin' of any man or any man's money, from now on. Luke is goin' to support Luke. But society owes Luke a debt of three hundred an' twelve dollars an' sixty-six cents. And if you'll pay that debt, Luke'll make society foot the bill. That's all."

Mattox drew in a long breath. He was slowly perceiving that he was in a most peculiar situation, one of delicate ethics. Here was an ex-cracksman, a man who, if he cared to use his resources, had access to many friends in the safe-blowing "profession" and doubtless hidden sets of tools as well. This man, consumed with a bitterness toward society in general, was offering to put into his hands for the trivial sum of three hundred and twelve dollars and some odd cents that book for which he had just offered twenty-five hundred dollars and would have offered more if he could have done so; that book which stood in the way of the biggest happiness of his life; that book which, by all the devious considerations of logic, and ethics, too, certainly and assuredly belonged to Horatio Silverthorne, and which most certainly and most assuredly did not belong to the man Jech.

He might have asked many questions, but he refrained completely. He fidgeted uneasily in his chair. He wished he could banish from his mind the unpleasant possibilities which flitted through it.

"Luke, I'm not asking you any questions," he said, "but I'm telling you frankly to stay out of this thing. Stay out of it! Never mind butting in! I'll solve my own problems in some way. I'll—"

"But nevertheless if I did drop in on you one o' these days," said the man on the bed imperturbably, "an' put that there Vindelinus into your hand, you'd put into my hands th' sum of three hunderd and twelve dollars and sixty-six cents. That's quite agreed then." He paused a bare second. "His name is Jech, eh? An' his curio dump is at No. 14 East Twenty-second Street?"

Mattox frowned. If he had known that this peculiar situation was to come about, he would not have come up here at all. The man across from him on the bed had conceived a mad idea of some sort, and it was plain that nothing was going to banish it from his mind.

"Confound it, Luke," Mattox returned, "you've heard me spill the name and address! For heaven's sake, Luke, forget all I've told you. Stay out of this affair."

"Thanks. Can I see you to-morrow, Dirk?"

Mattox rose suddenly. He was feeling more than disturbed, appreciably faint, either from the developments of the last twenty minutes or else from the sickening odors of the cheap cooking that surged in over the transom. "Luke," he begged, "don't go and do anything rash that's going to—"

"Call here to-morrow," snapped the other irritably, "or I'll come into your office myself. Which'll it be?"

"I'll—I'll—call here myself," said the younger man hastily.

"Good-by," said McCracken with a curt note of dismissal in his voice. "Don't forget."

Mattox found himself walking down the dark stairs in a daze. A short distance down Halsted Street he stopped at the first trolley-post and leaned against it.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated faintly. "What—what have I started in that crazy dare-devil's brain back in the Star Hotel? I must have been stark mad to have discussed it—to have acceded to that offer about the three hundred-

odd—to have even humored him. I'd better go back." And back he went.

When he got back the second time, however, the room was empty. Its occupant evidently had left immediately after his own departure.

Very much disturbed in mind Mattox went on to West Madison Street and made his business call where he succeeded in disposing of thirty noiseless typewriter platens. From there he dragged his footsteps to his office where he puttered around the whole afternoon in a blue funk, his mental operations hampered by a deadening misery of mind.

When he went home to his room that night he went to bed early, tired out, but in spite of his weariness he continued to stare in the darkness at his ceiling for a long time. It was one o'clock when he fell asleep and when he awoke early in the morning he was still tired and conscious of a peculiar heavy weight that seemed to be pressing in on his spirits.

He went to the door of his room and got his morning paper which was left there early every morning by the servant of the establishment. He unfolded it, and sitting down at the window in pajamas and bath robe he began to look over the headlines of the latest six-passenger trans-Pacific flight attempt, scheduled for last night. But something on the first page quite took away all his interest in affairs of long-distance aviation and caused a lump to creep into his throat which seemed to be slowly strangling, choking, smothering him.

It was a news story, short on account of the extreme nearness to press time with which it had evidently reached the paper. It told briefly how one, Casimer Jech, a curio dealer of East Twenty-second Street, had been shot to death by a cracksman whom he obviously had surprised tinkering at his safe in the middle of the night.

The cracksman had made good his escape through the

rear window by which he had entered, leaving a few of his tools in front of the safe. The actual tools were not named, for it was evident that the story had been hurriedly phoned in to the city editors as the presses had begun to turn for the morning editions, but the implements left behind, whatever they were, were simple in nature and indicated that their owner had intended to utilize forcible and somewhat audible methods of entry into the safe, thus proving that he must have first made a visit to, or purchase from, the proprietor and ascertained that the latter was quite deaf. Indeed, certain other curious and simple paraphernalia left behind him in his flight indicated that he had either known or surmised that the owner of the shop himself lived upstairs, and that he was so preparing his operations that the latter, while oblivious to the sound, could not "feel" the attempts to enter his safe. As for the owner of the shop, the curio dealer himself, the cracksman had left the latter's body to bleed to death in the spot where he had shot the other down. And the safe itself, the objective of this tragedy, had withstood opening, bearing only some significant preliminary scratches showing that murder had prevented a possible successful safe burglary.

When Mattox finished the thing, he rose weak and shaking from his chair and flung himself face downward on his bed. "Merciful God!" he groaned. "Why—why did I allow him to make such a proposition? Why in God's name didn't I refuse point-blank instead of tacitly accepting? He—Luke—didn't kill Jech. It was I. And I—I am the real murderer!"

CHAPTER XV

THE FLAW IN THE ALIBI

FOR a long while Dirk Mattox lay on the bed, face down, a thousand devils seeming to be gnawing at his heart. If only he could undo the results of his yesterday's trip to the reckless Luke McCracken, what would not he give now? But it was too late. McCracken had tried to get the Vindelinus, had been surprised in the attempt, and had been forced to kill the curio dealer in order to make his own escape.

Dumbly, Mattox wondered whether he himself would ever smile again. What a fool, a blind, blind fool, he had been even to talk over such a matter with a penniless, embittered, yet skillful cracksman, much less to have agreed to the other's proposition! But nothing, nothing, could be done now. He, Dirk Mattox, was a murderer.

He sat up listlessly in a little while and mechanically began to draw on his clothing. He forgot entirely such a thing as breakfast when he got out on the street, but as he passed restaurants filled with people he wondered dully whether he would ever eat again for the rest of his life.

He caught the first car west and there transferred to Halsted Street. At the Star Hotel he got off and again climbed the dark dingy stairs inside. One or two sleep-heavy men in dirty blue-flannel shirts came lurching down toward the bright morning sunlight and the near-beer saloons that clustered in that block, and at the first landing Mattox passed the slatternly landlady peering out into the hall and rubbing her puffy, sleepy eyes, in front of which strands of dyed gray hair were floating.

Up he went, and still up, till he got to the fourth floor. There he went down the hall and with a leaden heart tapped

at the door of No. 414. There was no answer. He rapped louder. Again no answer came. He turned the knob and walked in, closing the door quickly behind him.

It was just as he had surmised. The bed had not been slept in all night, and he even detected a peculiar little triangular fillip in the dirty counterpane which had impressed itself upon his eye the day before. So McCracken had not only committed murder in his efforts to help him, Mattox, but was now a fugitive from justice; at least the early paper had not mentioned his having been captured.

At the thought of McCracken's possible and probable capture, a sudden terrible panic seized Mattox. When McCracken was caught, then must the whole miserable story come out to the police, and therefore to the public: Mattox's visit to the Star Hotel; his description of his desire for the Vindelinus de Spira; of the money he had offered for it; his semi-acceptance of McCracken's obvious proposition; his relations with Silverthorne which could scarcely be hidden; and Iolanthe—Iolanthe must be dragged into the whole horrible notoriety. It sickened him, so that he leaned weakly against the wall and steadied himself with his hand.

Perhaps, though, he reflected desperately, McCracken had not been caught. Perhaps he had succeeded in hiding the rest of the night in some alley or courtway. But this evidence—his bed unslept in—this must be damning when that frowsy landlady should come upstairs and find it thus; and when the police should later look up Luke McCracken, only recently released from the Joliet penitentiary for safe-blowing.

With his lips shut tight together, Mattox strode across the room and roughly seized the counterpane. He now realized well what he was doing, but one thing stood forth in his mind—the picture of the delicately reared girl on South Park Way clad in her blue-silk gown and with her

glorious eyes of purple black; she must not be dragged into this thing, murder or no.

With a jerk he threw back the counterpane, tossed back the upper sheet, twisted it roughly, pommeled the pillow, and then beat the mattress with his two fists. When he stood erect again he knew one thing—that bed, to all outward appearances, had been slept in the night just gone. He turned away sadly.

"Accessory before the fact—to murder," he groaned to himself; "and now accessory after the fact. Oh, Dirk Mattox, Dirk Mattox, what have you come to at last?"

He left the room, closing the door softly behind him and tiptoed down to the sunny street again. But to him there was no sun, no morning. Everything seemed shrouded in a great engulfing black shadow.

Listlessly, he took a car southward, and inside of an hour he was walking up the steps of the graystone South Park Way house where Silverthorne resided. He rang the bell and stared dazedly, unseeingly out at the street.

The door opened presently, and a negro woman greeted him: "Good mornin', Mista Mattox."

"Good morning, Mammy Johnson. Is—"

"You all wants to see Io, I reckons. Will you jes' step yo'sef into de pahlah, sah. De lil' gal is jes' done eatin' huh breakfas' all alone."

"All alone? Is—" Mattox said no more but walked through the door the negro woman held open for him and marched into the parlor. He sank into the nearest chair, and a long sigh escaped him.

The negro woman disappeared, and a minute later, Iolanthe Silverthorne, this time clad in a shiny gown of orange silk that set off her jet hair and eyes, stood before him in the parlor door. She stared uneasily toward him.

"Dirk!" Her welcoming smile faded. "Why, Dirk, what's —what's the matter? You look so—" She stopped.

He forced a smile to his face which stared back pale at him from the mirror across the room and restrained himself from passing a hand over his brow. "Hello, honey girl!" he said in a voice that sounded strange and far away to his own ears. "I came—came to see your father for a minute."

The girl appeared still puzzled at the sick look in his face. She closed the door of the parlor and came over to him, where she dropped into a chair facing him. "Dirk, you aren't ill, are you? You look as—as though you've seen a ghost."

"No, dear," he said quite truthfully; "I'm not sick. But I've had something in the way of a shock. I dropped in, early as it is, to speak to your father."

"But father," she informed him, "went to New Orleans late last night."

"Not here, then?" queried Mattox wearily. "What time did he go? And when will he be back? Of course he hasn't seen the news, then?"

"News?" the girl questioned. "What news?"

"Something of interest only to him," Mattox replied cautiously. "What carried him away from Chicago so unexpectedly? Or is it none of my business, dear?"

"Well," the girl returned, "he seemed to be under a good deal of tension yesterday. Later in the afternoon he told me that he had developed a sudden determination to do something which hadn't been in his mind in the morning. And while downtown on business he stopped in the ticket office of the Southern and Gulf Coast Airways in the Palmer House and bought a round-trip ticket to New Orleans on the plane that leaves Checkerboard Field at eleven-forty each night. I was so tired from the Madgely's dance the night before that I went to my room early, while he was packing a black suitcase in his room.

"I kissed him good night," Iolanthe went on, "and he

told me to run off and go to sleep; that he would be back in Chicago to-morrow night. That's to-night, of course. I heard him leave the house along about nine-thirty, and then I dropped completely off to sleep. And—" She stopped short. "Dirk," she said, paling, "there's—there's nothing happened to father, is there? No—no air accidents?"

Mattox forced the most reassuring smile to his lips that he could. "Absolutely nothing, dear girl! I wanted to see him only about a matter that indirectly involves us both. I'm—well I was sort of gradually swinging him around toward giving his consent—but some unforeseen complications have intervened. I'm more or less upset and not able to talk very coherently this morning. And so you must excuse me if I—" He broke off his words as the telephone bell in the outer hall rang sharply.

Iolanthe rose suddenly. "Excuse me, Dirk, till I answer the phone. It's probably my friend Lillian. She usually calls up about this time of the morning." She hurried from the room.

Mattox arose and gazed moodily out toward the street. He was so upset that he could not sit long in one place. From the curved bay windows he paced back to the other end of the parlor where the small Chippendale desk sat against the folding doors and their purple portières. There he stood scowling absent-mindedly down at the delicate piece of furniture.

Suddenly his gaze turned into one of attentiveness. He leaned forward and looked more closely. From a tiny drawer underneath the row of pigeon-holes a generous bit of orange-colored paper peeped forth. That it was the corner of an airways ticket was indisputable, both from its color, which he knew was standardized for the southern air lines, and its checkerboard border suggesting to all prospective passengers, no doubt, that departures would be made from the famous Checkerboard Field and no other! But if this were not sufficient to indicate its genesis as an

air-transport ticket, the glass-enclosed pilot's cabin of what must have been a huge 12-passenger monoplane was visible on the exposed portion of the billet.

Gingerly he reached forward and pulled gently at it. Iolanthe was still talking at the telephone in the outer hallway. He pulled harder, whereupon the broad orange-colored strip slid from the tiny drawer.

His eyes popped forward in their sockets as he looked at the paper. It was indeed a round-trip ticket to New Orleans on the Southern and Gulf Coast Airways. It bore coupons for both passages, coupons entitling the passenger to berth, and coupons entitling him to refreshments. It bore the date of the night preceding. But it had never even seen a steward's steel punch, nor had one of its coupons even been detached for the auditing offices.

As Mattox stood with the thing hanging from his fingers, several things drove themselves into his mind with dazing force. Horatio Silverthorne knew of Jech's illegal possession of the Vindelinus de Spira; he wanted that book so badly that he had become almost obsessed about the matter; he had failed to purchase it with what was left of his one-time snug fortune; he knew that it was kept nowhere but in Jech's ancient safe; he knew also that the curio collector was very deaf; he had packed a small bag in secrecy last night; and he had left ostensibly to go to New Orleans on some mysterious errand. But he had not gone at all, for here—here was the ticket!

What, then, was Horatio Silverthorne doing during the night just passed?

CHAPTER XVI

THE HISTORY OF A NOBLE ART

THE replacing of the telephone receiver in the outer hall interrupted Dirk Mattox in his examination of the unused round-trip air ticket to New Orleans. He had just time to jam it back in the tiny drawer and turn from the desk when Iolanthe appeared once more in the doorway.

"Yes; it was Lillian," she told him. "She wants me to come over and spend to-night with her, but it's Mammy Johnson's night off, if she decides to take it, and I can't go unless father gets back in time. I really shouldn't leave the house alone."

Mattox said nothing. He would have given a great deal to know when her father would really return. With a sigh he took up his hat and turned to the door.

"Well, dear, it doesn't seem as though we ever get time to talk to one another any more. It seems that I keep dropping in—and then rushing away again. I'm sorry. Don't think I don't care any more. Everything will be smoothed out soon, and to-night is the night for our regular visit, come to think of it. I'll call up later about that. And now will you excuse me?"

Iolanthe came over to him and, standing on tiptoes, kissed him on the lips—a warm tingling kiss that, strangely enough, seemed to cause him more pain than pleasure. Then he made his escape, his thoughts still in confusion.

Once around the corner of South Park Way he slowed down and began to think. A strange, insidious, perplexing problem had thrust itself upon his mind during the last fifteen minutes. Had Luke McCracken, after all, burglarized, or rather attempted to burglarize, Jech's safe? Or had Silverthorne, in a collector's mad desperation at his

inability to get that which to him seemed nearly priceless, attempted to do the thing himself? McCracken had not been in his room all night. Neither had Silverthorne taken that night trip which would have put him in New Orleans at nine this morning, that trip for which he had openly and ostensibly bought a ticket. Which of the two?—Mattox shook his head perplexedly. And a sudden peculiar thought entered his consciousness at this point.

He knew nothing of safe-cracking; he could not even, at this juncture, recall a single authoritative fiction story about this alleged art, other than O. Henry's highly colored romance of the expert who merely sandpapered his fingertips and magically opened a vault by the sense of touch. Yet he realized that a past master of the subject, who knew its history, its characters, its very technique, could tell with a five minutes' personal examination of the premises whether that job had been a professional's or an amateur's. The news story had spoken of certain curious yet simple paraphernalia that had been used, and had mentioned tools that were found as well. Were they tools of a professional? Or just tools such as any amateur cracksman could obtain? There was the question, indeed. If one only had the requisite knowledge, one might pull some official wires somehow—why, there was Oliver Oliver, if nobody else—and get into the scene itself, and with mouth tightly shut interpret at first hand exactly what must have transpired.

But if he was to be the canny interpreter, the Indian reading broken twigs, as it were, then he would have to know his subject—and know it like a master.

For a few minutes he stood where he was, thinking deeply: one of the peculiarities of a business which sold a commodity used by every walk and profession of life was that one could always rout up an appreciative acquaintance in any line—whether it be a bartender or a baronet. And thus it was that within the third minute of his rumina-

tions, a sudden sigh of relief escaped from him like steam from a boiler, and it was due to the same thing that within fifteen minutes he was walking up the steps of a fashionable apartment building on the Midway, Jackson Park, to become, as it were—and God willing!—a specialist on the subject of safe-cracking!

His ring at the bell of the first apartment was answered by a trim maid in lace apron, and he said simply: "I would like to speak to ex-police commissioner Richard Granby."

She ushered him into a little study facing on the street, a study which had been converted, by folding doors, from a sun parlor, where a man with blind eyes—a grave-faced man with iron gray hair—and blue dressing gown—was writing away on a typewriter from which the barest semblance of sound was emanating. His keen ears seemed to prick up as his visitor was escorted into the cozily furnished study with its simple drapes and wicker furniture, and he was on his feet in a moment, his blind eyes staring—but his lips smiling.

"Mr. Dirk Mattox, I believe?" he said. "Your brief query of the maid as you passed through the parlor was enough to identify you. I never forget voices. And I suppose you've come to see how your noiseless platen is working out?"

"Yes—partly, and more," asserted Mattox briefly. He dropped into a chair which the blind ex-commissioner of police hauled out for him, and the latter, drawing the folding doors of the study to, settled back in his own chair.

"I have just been writing one of a series of articles on yeggs for *The Psychological Review*," the blind man said. "In fact, I got up early and worked on it while the rest of the house were still asleep, and thanks to your noiseless platen they all slept like babies while I was hammering away at the keys. I suppose that is a double testimonial—both for the touch system of typewriting and for your remarkable platen?"

"It is," asserted Mattox, "particularly coming, as it does, from a great police commissioner of other days." His voice, however, held none of the elation that a tribute to his inventiveness should have elicited.

"Leave the police part of my history out," said Richard Granby gravely, yet kindly. "My days with the department, Mattox, are a stench in my own nostrils. Politics—wire pulling—incompetency—inefficiency. I would rather think of myself in connection with my active days with the larger private detective systems. Still, I must admit, that my days in the official police department were valuable—for they gave me much first hand information on my favorite study—the yegg."

"The yegg," mused Mattox sadly. He was lost for a moment. Then he caught himself with a start, and looked up. The blind eyes were unseeingly on him—blind eyes that, due to merely pathological disease of the optic nerves, would never again survey a blown safe, a foot-print, a scratch, a bent tool, a developed fingerprint, or any of the other traces left behind by prowling marauders who worked only in the dead of night.

"Commissioner," said Mattox, "I've really dropped over to see you today to learn what you can tell me about the noble art of safecracking. No, I'm not thinking of indulging—nor am I contemplating a novel on the subject, or even a short-story. But something has come up in my affairs—recently," he added, with a touch of cautiousness, and to this he amended "the affairs of—of a friend, better, and I've got to do some investigating on my own hook. More than this I just feel I can't say."

"And God forbid that you do explain further," said the former commissioner hastily. "For I've too many friends in the department to want to know anything that would have to be kept a secret by me." He paused. "But I'd like to help you just the same. I wish I could help you—and directly. But a blind man has to live in the past and in the

theory of a science. However, I'll give you a condensation of the noble art that you ask about. And with that, I hope you can work out your problem."

Mattox leaned back in his chair. Somewhere, in such an exposition, he would learn, if ever, that which could prove whether McCracken or Silverthorne had made a try at the safe of Casimer Jech, curio merchant.

"The struggle, Mattox, between those who tried to make safes impregnable, and those who tried to defeat this achievement," began the ex-police commissioner who had just declared that he did not feel at all proud of his association with the official police system, "has been going on ever since the first safe that locked with a key—and it has taken most peculiar turns, back and forth, first one side getting the advantage and then the other. In fact, the noble art of saying 'Open Sesame' to an iron box," he went on dryly, "began right after the Civil War. It is said that war always starts some new intellectual or artistic movement—and just as the last war started a world-wide Louis period of interior decoration, so the Civil War started the safe prowlers. In fact, Mattox, the first-known job of this sort was done in 1866 by Langdon W. Moore, a famous burglar, on a manufacturing plant at Bergen, Long Island. Your grandmother must have been a young girl when Langdon Moore, with his simple drill, wrote the opening page of a new phase of history. Nitro-glycerine had never been heard of—nor even the combination dial. Safes were locked with various fancy intricate locks, and since keys were nicely hidden and impressions of them couldn't be gotten, Langdon Moore and the long list of disciples that followed him had to create an alternative technique for entering these precious cubicles.

"This technique," continued Granby, smoothing back his iron gray hair from his temples, "consisted simply of boring a hole above the handle where the lock was, and pouring in gunpowder. For gunpowder, Mattox, was the

only thing that the early safe-burglars used—gunpowder that had despatched so many of the lads in the blue and the gray of yours and my grandfather's day.

"You'll note that I do not speak of these early safe burglars as yeggs. For the term had not yet come into being. Have you ever heard where it *did* originate?" He waited till he heard Mattox's simple negative, and then went on. "You know, Mattox, it's been erroneously stated that the term 'yegg' came from old John Yeagdon, one of the first burglars who turned his attention to strongboxes, but through my own personal studies I am able to say this is incorrect. It has come, instead, from the German word 'jaeger,' meaning hunter. For the early yegg, Mattox, wasn't a safeblower at all. He was only a tramp who went prowling around the country right after the Civil War, locating jobs for regular gangs to tackle. When he'd get the full data on a job—or locate one that, for instance, provided a post office or country-store that was a nice distance off from the town hotel, with plenty of freights and the exact freight schedules to get away on—*etc.*—including, of course, the make of the safe in use, that entire collation of data was of great utility. He'd take it to a regular gang, and turn it over to them for a small percentage of the profits that would be gotten out of the job. And the country was full of such wandering hoboes who just hunted information for robber gangs. Jaegers—hunters, Mattox. They were the yeggs."

"And I suppose," put in Mattox, "that in due course the slave class became the master class, as in all social organizations?"

"Exactly," said the blind man. "For it wasn't long before these wandering hoboes, through association with the more daring burglars, began to pick up the secrets—the technique of safe cracking themselves, at least as practised in the days of soft metal and crude gunpowder. And then began a new era, for the number of 'jaegers' or yeggs

had been ten to a dozen to every robber clique; and this social upheaval, as it were, suddenly increased the number of operators tenfold. Now the former jobs of the yeggs or jaegers were entrusted to young boys called 'cat kids,' 'broncs' or 'bronchos'—generally, Mattox, runaway kids that wanted to see the road. And now the kids, who couldn't take over the reins of the masters, were getting the information, and the old pupils had become the masters."

Granby paused a moment, fingertips on fingertips. Mattox was drinking in all this authoritative information, picturing in his mind a certain safe lying about five miles from this cozy study. And now the ex-commissioner again resumed his explanation.

"After safes began to pop all over the country," he said, "the makers began to get worried. Daniel—Daniel—yes, that is it—Daniel Fitzgerald had, in 1843, invented the Salamander Safe, which was generally in use. It had two shells, an inner and an outer, and he advertised it as fireproof, by filling the interior with plaster-of-paris. But it wasn't yeggproof. That was the trouble now. He assigned his patent to B. J.—B. J.—yes, B. J. Wildey, who now called it Wildey's Patent Safe, and who altered it by filling it in with air, fire clay, chalk, and even alum, which turns to water when heated, so as to make it truly fireproof. But the fireproof devices didn't always work.

"As they tried to make better safes," the commissioner continued, evidently warming up to his pet subject, "so they tried to make better locks. The Bramah was the first unpickable lock—at least it was so advertised. Then there came the Chubb; and then the Pye Lock of 1851, and it may interest you, incidentally, to know, Mattox, that the Pye Lock, advertised as unpickable, was picked by Linus Yale, Jr., of Philadelphia, the lock expert who has been the forerunner of the Yale lock that every one of us, including yourself, uses today. Then there came the—but," the commissioner broke off, "I believe you're more inter-

ested in the forcible entries, you said, than the Jimmy Valentine stuff! So we'll get back to our mutton."

He paused a brief second, then went on.

"So, as I was telling you, I believe, when safes began to pop all over the country, the makers conceived the wonderful idea of filling the hollow between the front and back shells with fine sand; thus, Mattox, when the cracksman drilled in, the sand would keep running down into his drill hole, and he couldn't pour in his powder. But what did Johnny Yegg do then? He just inserted a hollow quill and blew his powder into the interior. And that was that. And safes continued to pop!

"And so it went, my friend, till 1890. Then a case-hardened safe was created by Herring, Hall and Marvin, called the 'Patent Champion.' And now, Mattox, the old powder burglars were done—they couldn't drill in—their drills couldn't make even an impression. They were beaten at last. And let me tell you, my young friend with a desire for information, the fiction writers who write today about drilling a safe have not refreshed their minds for a quarter of a century. No safe, Mattox, used during the last quarter century or built in the last thirty-five years, can be drilled. No drill is found in any burglar's kit today. And I've examined many a kit, let me tell you that!

"So much, then, for that. And now that an American inventor had beaten the drill-and-powder burglar, of which, Mattox, there were thousands, was the yegg done? He was done for just about a couple of quiet years—when lo and behold, a Swedish inventor, Alfred Nobel—you've heard of him, quite naturally—invented dynamite with which he hoped to end all war. But when he did that, he brought back safe-cracking as a new and lucrative profession. For his dynamite gave the old burglar nitroglycerine and a brand new and easier technique than ever before.

"For now the gunpowder yegg became the 'soup-man.' And now that for the first time he became, in a sense, a

technical expert, a language sprung up among wandering yeggmen that had never existed before. And a system of names sprung up—for 'soup-men' took on the dignity and nomenclature of a profession. And individuals began to become personalities among the brotherhood, depending on their titles as derived from their physical appearances, their mannerisms, or their hangouts.

"For instance, Mattox, a fat man from Denver became Denver Fatty; a thin man from Omaha became Omaha Slim; a red-haired man from Cincinnati became Cinci Pink; a blond Swede from Minneapolis became Minny Whitey—perhaps Minny Whitey, the Bundle Bum. 'The Bundle Bum' meant that Minneapolis Whitey carried an extra clean shirt with him on the road for an occasional change. One famous safecracker who in my day, Mattox, was electrocuted in Sing Sing had a long, unnaturally long face; and he was known to his—er—confrères as Goat Harbison. His right hand man was called 'Tea' because at the 'smudge' or yeggman's campfire, he always brewed tea instead of the 'java' of the rest of the gang. A man with the jerks, a victim say of St. Vitus Dance—such a man could only function as a lookout man, for he could never handle 'soup'—would be called 'Frisco Jerks,' as one with a scar might be called 'New Orleans Criss-Cross.' Nor is there any color line in crookdom, Mattox. Black cracksmen are generally called 'Smoke'—such as 'Nashville Smoke'—'Memphis Smoke'—'Birmingham Smoke.'

"You've seen many times a couple of little black twins on a certain billboard ad for a cleaning powder, around the city, Mattox? Even when I had my sight that ad was becoming prominent. Well—that ad right today, has given to a certain pair of black women safecrackers the pseudonym 'The Gold Dust Twins' in crookdom. And speaking of women in this connection I want to say that such have swelled the lists of safecrackers, because cracking safes is a delicate job and not one requiring hard physical work.

For it's technique, Mattox; and knowledge. Some of the notorious women who have made manufacturers and bankers sweat blood are Mattie Bloomly, or Mrs. Harry Bloomly, 28 years old and pretty as a picture. Grew up in a house with three brothers who were yeggs, and thus she learned the trade. As a blind, she used to work daytimes as a telephone operator. And there was Margaret Cassidy, sister of a crook named Pittsburg Cassidy; she helped rob Boggs and Buehl, a Pittsburg department store, to the tune of $48,000. Incidentally, she was captured for murder. That shows you that in this game of which you've been inquiring, women can show daring nearly the equal of men.

"But I think," the ex-commissioner went on, "I was telling you about the new system of names that came up with the introduction of nitroglycerine. And the new language that came up with it. Possibly that isn't just the information you're looking for; still it may interest you so long as you're here being made the victim of an old-timer's reminiscences. So, to be amused, for instance: 'Punk' is bread, in yeggdom; and you know without my telling you that 'soup' is nitro. The newspapers have educated you on that! A name for it that you may not have heard, however, is 'dinny.' Jail is 'jug'—and prison is 'stir.'

"And there's lots of names for money, Mattox, just as there's lots of kinds of money! These birds call it 'kale' and 'scratch' and 'dough.' When they pull off a jewelry store robbery, they speak of the rings themselves as 'hoops'; the watches are 'supers,' 'blocks,' 'turnips' or 'kettles'; while the modern wrist-watches are 'thimbles.' In like manner chains are 'white slang' or 'red slang' depending on whether they are silver or gold; and diamonds, as you may know, are 'rocks' or 'ice.' If it's a post office robbery they've pulled off, they call the stamps which are the chief things they get, 'stickers.' A safe is either a 'pete' or a 'gopher,' and the strongbox inside of the more modern safe is the

'kiester.' A safecracker, if he is a good 'peterman,' or perhaps is lucky, 'kicks in the gopher' that he's after! He may be a desperate man; his 'lighthouse' or 'lookout' may have left him in the lurch, and he may have to kill a night-watchman to avoid arrest. He may do it with a knife to avoid the sound of shots. If he does that, he has, in his own language 'croaked the tincan with a chiv.' Possibly, though, he leaves a hat or a clue near the scene of the crime; maybe he's been working with a 'moll,' that being a female accomplice. Maybe the police get him through the retailer's label in that hat or 'skypiece.' Maybe he and she, after the murder, have made a number of 'scatters' or dives, and are 'heeled with a good bolt of scratch' from the robbery; that is, they have plenty of money. But the 'dicks'—that's the local plainclothes men—or the central office men—'elbows' the crook calls them—reach him. He goes up before the 'green lights'; that's on the carpet of the police system. And how he hates that ordeal! He'd rather walk the plank in mid-ocean. For there they third-degree him, and 'mug' him, and his accomplice. They throw him into a cell, probably, with a 'tuberose'—that being, Mattox, crook's argot for a filthy, dirty old drunk. Our peterman is held over for a hearing; if it's only a robbery job—no murder—he may raise bail, only to jump it, in which case he becomes a 'lamster.' But if it's murder, he goes up for trial. If he's out of luck, he gets 'topped'—hanged for the crime—while the 'moll' probably goes to the 'big-house'—the pen—for life, where she eats 'cherries' and 'java' every night—that's beans and coffee—with 'little girl in tights' on Sunday. That being bacon!"

The blind man paused a moment, half smiling reminiscently, absently, whereupon Mattox, his nervous system not feeling particularly tranquil at the description of people being 'topped,' and accessories going for long stretches of time to the 'big house,' made haste to turn the conver-

sation back to practical matters which might help him to fill in the squares of a most peculiar cross-word puzzle.

"You say, Commissioner," he put in hastily, "that the yegg became a soup man with the invention of dynamite? How—that is—how is that? How in the devil does a yegg ever get hold of nitroglycerine? How—"

"That," said the blind ex-official, "is one of the simplest things in the world. It's commonly supposed, Mattox, that only people on the inside of the explosive manufacturing business can get nitroglycerine, but nitro is something that can be made with little or no practise, at any ordinary hobo camp fire—or on any one-hole kitchen gas burner in Chicago. When I finish telling you this, you could, yourself, without any further instruction, make nitro yourself." He paused. Mattox pricked up his ears. The commissioner went on speaking. "All that is needed by a crook, Mattox, to make nitroglycerine is a galvanized iron waterbucket, a syringe with a long nozzle, and a rubber hot water bottle. If our yegg is a city yegg—and his friends who happen to have a supply are out of town—he gets hold of some ordinary dynamite as used for blasting the foundations of big skyscrapers. Probably he picks the lock on the dynamite shanty where a big building is going up, while the night watchman is sleeping; or he gets a job as day laborer, and goes in and out of that shanty a dozen times during the day. Or, with overalls on, he goes into a country hardware store on the outskirts of the city, and buys some dynamite cartridges with which to blow up stumps on his supposed farm. If he's a wandering yegg, he does the same thing—plays farmer—or possibly robs the magazine near the section line shanty of some railroad.

"By whatever simple means our yegg gets it, he first crumples up his dynamite between his fingers on a newspaper spread on the ground or the kitchen floor. This done, his galvanized bucket is partly filled with water from

a nearby stream—or the city tap!—and rigged up over a fire of twigs or dried wood—or, in the city, a kitchen gas burner—and as soon as the water is just about to boil, just showing the first minute bubbles, the crumbled dynamite is dropped into the bucket. The hot water dissolves it, the grease and sawdust forming the substantial part of it rise to the top, and the heavier viscid nitroglycerine sinks to the bottom of the bucket. After ten minutes the top scum is skimmed off by our yegg, the bucket is lifted to the ground—or the kitchen floor, if it's a city flat—and the 'soup-maker' sucks the nitroglycerine up from the bottom with his long syringe, and squirts it gently into the hot-water bottle. A few ounces are more than enough for a number of raids: that is the most that would ever likely be prepared at one time.

"However, Mattox, if you contemplate making some nitro, don't do it. Yeggs hate the job worse than poison. For the price of the little operation I've just described is always a splitting headache for everyone having anything to do with it, due to the nitric acid fumes that arise from the hot solution. But if you ever do make any, don't carry it in a glass bottle, because if the bottle breaks or the cork is too tight and the gases accumulate under it, you're literally knocking at St. Peter's gates. Many an old gunpowder yegg saved us police—or us Burns operatives—a lot of trouble back in the 90's, simply because he used a glass bottle. Indeed, we might say that the Goodyear Rubber people and little Willie's tummyache have, in a sense, robbed many a bank!"

"How does the—er—safecracker apply this juice?" asked Mattox cautiously. Had that other cracksman, he wondered dully, gotten as far as even trying 'soup,' before he laid out his tools? Or had he never even intended to use this technical method? The answer to that question would solve a mighty troublesome riddle.

The answer to his spoken question, however, came

promptly. "Applying nitro isn't difficult," said the ex-commissioner. "And that's exactly why it became such a menace to the builders of safes. For it isn't the power of the juice, Mattox; it's the fact that it can be handled so easily.

"A cup of putty or common yellow soap is formed and stuck to the safe door at the point or against the crack where the explosion is desired to take place. Into this cup the yegg—or yeggess!—pours a small quantity of the 'soup,' varying with the strength of his extract and the quality and cubical contents of the safe. I would say that a teaspoonful might be set down as the ordinary dose for the standard home size safe—only don't take this proportion for practical purposes if you ever become a cracksman, because the type of safe itself has to be considered." He paused. "Well, the soup is allowed to seep into the crevice. When it has nearly disappeared from the cup, the yegg attaches a detonating cap which he calls a 'double-X' or 'XX' to the site of the proposed explosion, with a bit of sticky rubber tape; to this cap is attached what he calls a 'short string'—that's a short bit of fuse. Lighting this, he retires well outside the line of action, particularly of the safe door, till the charge explodes. One shot is usually enough, for the 'v' or vault; if it's the kind that has a kiester or strongbox, and the desired plunder is small enough to have been put in this kiester, a further shot is required.

"In the first days of nitro," Granby went on, "many yeggs lost hands and arms galore. Many a safe, Mattox, even in my kid days, was literally blown to pieces, its contents utterly demolished, because of the yegg using ounces instead of teaspoonfuls, and I've known an entire building to be wrecked and kill the cracksman himself because, as his assistant testified, like the character in a recent popular song who 'pooshed and pooshed and pooshed,' he poured and poured and poured!"

"But they soon got the right dose, at the expense of a number of accidents. And a cracksman before long became so well fortified with data and experience—his own and other cracksmen's—that he could not only neatly dislodge the heavy door from a stout safe, but the more skillful ones could cause it to just topple forward with not more than a single thump as it fell out, hinges and all. And thus things stood, my friend, with the invention of nitroglycerine, banks and post offices succumbing all over the country. Now the safemakers tried to cast solid steel doors, but these popped open just as easily. They began then to create special bolts of high-tempered steel, reinforced with tempered knobs that couldn't be knocked, chiseled or blown off, and high-tempered combination dials, believing that there, after all, was the weak or focal point of all safes. It's true that the combination dial and the site of the dial—or the lock—*is* a weak point in a safe—that if it can be demolished by a 'shot,' even poorly executed, the bolts can often—in fact, usually—be worked through the open hole. But all this reenforcing of the bolts did nothing against the soup men."

Mattox was now listening intently. The matter of forcibly attacking with tools the actual knob, dial, or locks, was getting close to his own problem.

"At this point I might mention a rather amusing incident in this field," Granby interpolated, "for it served as a lesson to safecrackers and created a complication which of course they quickly overcame. It seems that a small safe in Wichita, Kansas, obtained with tin markers off of plugs of chewing tobacco, mind you, resisted successfully four attempts made at different times to crack it. The explanation, which finally got around crookdom, lay in the fact that the safe was a defective piece of casting, and there was an open hole somewhere in the side or back, from which the pent-up gases that, as you know, comprise the initial phase of every explosion, escaped with sufficient rapidity

to minimize the effects of the explosion itself, and prevent the door from being dislodged. Of course after that got out as a newspaper story, many safe owners tried the expedient of drilling a hole in the side or back of their safe as a protective device. But crooks, too, read newspapers, and thereafter every yegg made it part of his preliminary examination of his job to inspect a safe on all sides before he blew it; when he found such a hole, either by his electric torch or feeling, he used it to introduce his nitroglycerine in, then inserted a simple 5-cent steel tie bolt with a small cross bar on one end. That is, he slipped this jimcrack in and held it so that the crossbar crossed the orifice inside and against the sides of the hole. Over the end of the tiebolt projecting outside he slipped a small steel plate containing a hole the size of the bolt, and possibly a circular hole too for his fuse, providing he had used that particular point for insertion of his 'soup'; then he tightened a nut over the whole thing. The whole operation would take about thirty seconds. And the hole would be plugged so that the gases couldn't escape at the initial explosion, or plugged at least so that the door would get the full pressure of the initial charge, and at the worst bolt and door would blow out together. That ended that device of safe owners, which in some ways helped the cracksman, but I would venture nevertheless that no professional safeblower today would go on a job without a few 5-cent tie bolts and plates, or would shoot his shot without examining first to see whether that ancient simple protective device—a hole! —had been incorporated in the safe."

This was indeed interesting to Mattox, and his ears were drinking in every word of this apparently unimportant side matter.

The commissioner paused a moment, then went on.

"But, as I was saying," he remarked, "the safe makers, finding that special knobs and dials and bolts were of no utility, tried, through adroit machining, to fit doors so

tightly that the nitro wouldn't seep into the crack; and so the cracksmen used wedges, opened just enough of a crack to admit the destructive juice, and popped away!

"And thus," Granby added after a pause, "the dawn of 1900 found the safemaker beaten; the modern yegg had triumphed so far as explosive means of entering safes went. And now the safemaker turned his attention to huge safes in which there was kiester after kiester—or door after door. And here the yegg, confronting one of the newer and more complicated safes, had to scratch his head. For every separate door took a shot. Every shot meant an alarm—and the longer the delay after the first shot, the more difficult the getaway. And so now he began naturally to consider the oxy-hydrogen or acetylene jet which had evolved as the old and first steel skyscrapers began to have to be cut apart and torn down to give place to modern ones.

"Carrying this cumbersome apparatus and operating it, however, required a gang of more than one man; also it required a car. Add that to your today's education, Mattox. If a lone man has done a job, or if a gang has done it without a car, as sometimes happens, it will never have been an acetylene torch job." Granby paused, but his blind eyes did not see the pricked-up ears of his auditor. "In opening a safe in that way, the gang first drilled a small hole with the white-hot flame. Of course that made the safe hotter than blazes—inside and out—so hot you couldn't lay your hand on it. And so the minute the hole was large enough to admit a finger, they stopped. Now they connected up a rubber hose to a convenient water tap, and sent a jet of cold water inside the safe. Another hose, operated by another man, was connected up to play on the outside. And the job became, from that time on, a water-cooled job—for while the operator proceeded to eat out a much larger aperture, or to completely burn away the combination and knob, the hose wielders kept a continuous flow of cold

water to the interior of the safe and the exterior. Why, Mattox, when a gang of acetylene burglars finish a job, the place will look as if the original flood of Noah's day had been there!"

"Then I take it," said his hearer in a low voice, "that if a man—a yegg—were trying to get something that was perishable or damageable from a safe, he'd not think of using the acetylene flame?"

"Quite correct," asserted Granby. "It's an O. K. method for obtaining jewelry—old gold—or hard money, or even for destroying dangerous or incriminating papers that somebody wants out of the way. Other than that, some other method has to be used."

He paused a moment. "But, to our mutton. Now that the acetylene torch was being picked up by cracksmen in order to overcome the handicap imposed by many separate doors in a safe, the safemakers turned their attention to making steel that would be impervious to torch jets. Thus was developed the metal that today is called 'infusite,' a special cast iron mixed with copper, which resists the torch seven times as long as ordinary steel. To the Federal Reserve Bank at Washington, incidentally, goes the credit of developing it. It multiplies the time a cracksman must work by seven. And through the judicious use of this powerful metal, and the forging of safes with doors so thick and heavy and ponderous that no cracksman can eat his way through between Saturday night and Monday morning, which of course is the longest stretch of time available to a peterman, we reach the condition of today where, at least, no big safety deposit vault or trust company can be looted by burglars. He—and his gang—working even in shifts—are defeated simply by lack of time rather than by locks. Indeed, it is a relief to know, Mattox, that today your valuables and my valuables, kept in our downtown safety vault, are at last safe; that it is just the small man —the country merchant—the hick town bank—the side

street store-keeper of a big city—who will succumb to the cracksman." The ex-commissioner paused. Groping over his desk, he found a pipe which had already been filled and tamped down with tobacco. He lighted it clumsily with a mechanical lighter. Taking a few puffs, he added: "Well, old man, have I interested you? For that's all there is; there isn't any more. I've concluded my résumé of this noble art. Or is there anything further that you would wish to know?"

Mattox shook his head, oblivious to the fact that the blind eyes gazing in his direction could not see such a negative gesture. "You've given me a remarkable insight into a thing that was just newspaper talk before," he said, "and chock full of such fiction-writer's errors as you've described. I have the illusive feeling that I myself have been an old police worker and have known the field at first hand." He paused, thinking. "No, I think I have nothing further to ask, Commissioner." He rose. "One thousand thanks to you—and a new noiseless platen to you for your typewriter as long as you live. Remember, they wear out in time."

The ex-commissioner too arose. "That's the way to be successful," he observed with a faint smile. "Where would Wrigley have been today if chewing gum were perpetually chewable?"

Mattox essayed a troubled laugh. And with a parting handshake he made his way out on the green Midway once more, where, oblivious to the passersby and the autos humming past in both directions, he fell into a reverie.

"I'm a past master now on the art of yeggery," he ruminated bitterly. "Perhaps—and maybe not either! But if anybody could deduce anything about that Jech job, I ought to be able with all that Granby's told me on safe-robbing. But how to get in and see the actual spot? How to get in. Can Oliver Oliver accomplish it? I wonder?"

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH OLIVER OLIVER ENTERS THE PLAY!

IT was perhaps only natural that at the juncture in his troubled affairs which today's developments had brought about, Dirk Mattox should have thought deeply and deliberately about Oliver Oliver, his eccentric wealthy roommate at college, who had set himself up in the "detective" line after graduating, and who had at any rate succeeded thus far in solving two cases which had baffled the police.

Though it is to be admitted that Mattox had never had any particular respect for the genial Oliver Oliver's depth or detective ability, perhaps simply because a prophet never enjoys any esteem in his own college dormitory: but Oliver Oliver, of all people, provided a semi-official manner for investigating this attempted safe robbery and murder without going to the actual police. Even going to ex-commissioner Granby, as he had already done, was playing a bit too close to the danger line for Mattox. For the police—the real active, working police—must never suspect a single one of the damning facts that were locked tightly in his breast.

He knew enough of Oliver, of the things he had done for that same luckless young man in college, to be certain that Oliver's lips were as tight as the tightest, and that Oliver's promise was as unbreakable as a tempered steel band. If worst came to worst, and Oliver demanded his cards on the table—there were far less worthy recipients in the world for dangerous knowledge than old Double-O.

A consultation of the nearest telephone book showed him that Oliver's address was the Manhattan Building, not so far from the site of his own offices for the Mattox Noiseless Platen for Typewriters. So he took the elevated train at

once and was about to knock at the door of room No. 1111 when his old friend stepped from the elevator with his key in his hand.

He was a young, genial, and not particularly bright-looking fellow, dressed in a Prince Albert coat with narrow striped trousers legs. His vest was edged with white, and he wore an unusually tall white collar that seemed in keeping with his over-generous display of white cuffs. His face was smooth and pink and childlike. He carried a cane and wore black kid gloves, and on his head reposed a silk hat that tapered at the top. Indeed, he resembled an idle clubman more than a detective—or rather, a dabbler in police affairs.

His greeting was one of surprise and gratification. He snapped open the lock of his office door and bade the gloomy Mattox enter. It was a neat little room, fitted with a flat-top desk, a swivel chair, and a huge wall case containing what appeared to be three million separate drawers, all labeled in illegible handwriting.

The other side of the room held a diminutive chemical laboratory with marble shelf, iron ring stands, fragile beakers and retorts, and several hundred glass reagent bottles. A soft green rug covered the floor, and a roomy mahogany chair stood close by the desk. Mattox dropped into the chair and the slim, debonair Oliver took up the swivel chair close by.

"Well, you confounded old scout of the olden, golden days!" he said cheerily. "What brings you around here? Friendly call, I suppose?"

Mattox looked the other over carefully. "Oliver, I want to ask you some questions. This is a terribly serious matter. I don't exactly want any detective work or detective help." He paused. "First, however, have you access through your acquaintanceship and your work to the scene of crimes?"

"Access?" snapped the other. "I rather guess yes! Don't

you recall my telling you that my uncle on my mother's side is assistant chief of the Chicago police department? Has been for ten years or more. So I've got plenty of drag there. But why—"

"And the second question," put in Mattox nervously, "is this: Will you get me past the police cordon or doorkeeper or whatever is there, into the scene of that Jech killing—you know?—that safecracking and murder job that was pulled off last night on 22nd Street?"

"Hm!" said the other, drawing his brows together. "That's a funny question, old top. If this is a social call, you know I never dabble in anything that's mysterious—that is, socially, you know!—because I'm always confronting mysteries in my work and it's enough to have to solve *them.* So I'll have to know all about it—why you want to get in—and so forth!"

"But Oliver," put in Mattox, "don't ask me. Why must you know?"

"Old scout," said Oliver, "you're in some sort of trouble—a quandary. It doesn't take a detective to see that. And you're looking for light. But don't you know that it's always the facts that aren't handed over that are really the key facts to a puzzle? The very thing that you think you have to conceal is the key to what you are after. I know that from experience, without even yet knowing what you're after. And you'll muff what you're looking for as sure as shooting. Now listen: You're troubled as the devil. Come across with it, Dirk. I'm all by myself in this game. Not associated with the police or anybody. It's the firm of Oliver Oliver, a one-man band. Tell me what's on your mind and I'm with you—not against you."

This was a fair, man-to-man speech. For a moment Mattox surveyed the floor beneath his feet. Then he bowed his head to the situation.

"I realize you're my friend, Oliver. You and I roomed with one another through four hectic years at college. I

know you're a true sport, old Double-O, and a friend. And as you say, I'm in trouble. I'll tell you the story, but, Oliver, it vitally concerns a girl—a girl who's going to marry me perhaps. And not a word of this must ever escape your lips. What's happened has happened now. There's no way to undo it. That's the sad part of it all. But I need your help, that is your entree into things, to make a peculiar little investigation on my own hook. Oliver, I want to know definitely and conclusively whether a professional or an amateur cracksman made the attempt to rob that safe last night on 22nd Street, East."

Oliver looked at his visitor in some surprise. "Dirk, you know that my lips are shut tight with everybody. With you, they're doubly so. So—unload! Get it off your chest. What's the trouble? Give me the actual facts. If my professional drag and my investigator's luck—that's all detective work often is, Dirk—can help you out, it's all yours for the asking. And since it concerns a girl—well then, that's sufficient. Doesn't matter whether it's murder or petty larceny. It'll never get away from me. Come—out with it, Dirk."

Mattox rose from his chair and took several paces back and forth over the green-velvet rug. Then he dropped down into his chair again. He began at the beginning and related to the interested Oliver the whole story from the time that Silverthorne had suggested his erratic proposition, on through his trip to Jech's followed by the adventure of the veiled lady and her trip to Chinatown, his visit to Luke McCracken in the Star Hotel, their conversation, and his discovery in that morning's paper, scant on account of the nearness to press time with which the facts had reached the sheet. Then reluctantly, a little fearfully, he told of the supposed departure for New Orleans, via air, of the bibliophile and the non-use of the ticket he had purchased.

Oliver heard him through without a word or question.

At the end Mattox mopped his forehead and added: "So there's the whole set of horrible facts, Oliver. If McCracken pulled that stunt, then by all the holies I'm—I'm a murderer! I practically put him up to it and failed to use my abilities to dissuade him. I'll never draw a happy breath as long as I live again. My only hope, I might say, is that Silverthorne did it, but if he did—then how in God's name can I be happy going around with such a secret as that? It would kill his daughter if the truth got out, assuming that he's the one instead of McCracken. I want to try to find out, Oliver, from the condition of that safe whether a professional or an amateur tried to do that job. I've been over to see a friend—ex-commissioner Granby—a specialist on yeggs—and he's given me a couple of earfuls on his pet subject. If I can figure out whether it was an amateur or a professional who committed that ugly murder, that will settle my mind one way or the other for all time to come."

Oliver sat for several minutes, his long tapering fingers pressed tip to tip, his patrician brow wrinkled into a perplexed frown.

"Old man," he said at last, "I can imagine just how you feel. Be assured that it will be no trouble for you and me to get into that curio store; and be assured also that we ought to be able to tell whether a real peterman or an amateur tried his hand at the job. That'll settle your mind partly.

"I'm puzzled as to this veiled woman who quarreled bitterly with Jech yesterday," he went on. "There's no doubt that she, too, went there to negotiate in some way for that Vindelinus and that some one double-crossed her —the inmate of No. 1950 Archer Avenue. So, do you realize that there's the strange possibility that some one, some third person who knows her, some one who knows

from her that a fifty-thousand-dollar book was in that safe, pulled that stunt off; that it might be an attempt to circumvent the Chinese book collector, Wah Hung Fung?

"I realize of course that all this doesn't explain where Silverthorne was all last night when he didn't use his round-trip airways ticket," Oliver continued, "nor where McCracken was. But I'm only trying to give you a shred of consolation. It—may—may not be either. But, on the other hand, it may well be one of the two."

He shook his head dolorously. Then he rose. "Come! We needn't waste time sitting here. Let's make tracks for Jech's place."

CHAPTER XVIII

AMATEUR OR PROFESSIONAL?

WITHOUT a word Mattox got up. Oliver locked up his little office, and together they proceeded into the sunlight once more. They arrived at Jech's curio store within thirty minutes, and as was to be expected a khaki-coated policeman was posted in front of the door. Oliver, however, by the display of some magic badge on his vest soon had that bulky dignitary of the law stepping aside, and together the two friends went down the steps into the basement shop.

Inside there was not much of interest to be seen but a detective from central headquarters, with close-cropped mustache crowning a sallow but shrewd face, a brown tweed suit and derby hat cocked back over his head, standing in the opening of the partition which separated the office from the store. Both the tiny office and the store were brightly lighted and the headquarters man standing there glanced over his shoulder.

Oliver seemed to know him. "Hello, Tom!" he called. "Dropped in to look over the ground here. What do you know anyway? And what's the safecracking expert of the Chicago detective bureau doing on a penny-ante job like this?" He turned to Mattox and over his shoulder gave a significant look that said plainer than words: "Here's a man that knows his onions. We'll get the benefit of three astute minds if we pump him to a fareyouwell." And aloud he added. "Say, Tom, meet my friend, Mr. Mattox. He's interested in a minor way in criminology. Dirk, this is Tom Mackin, foremost safe robbery sleuth at the bureau downtown."

"Glad to meet you," the detective mumbled with a jerk

of his head and an air that said plainer than words that he was very much bored with all embryonic criminologists. He stepped back into the store and looked the speaker over scornfully. "What are you fooling around here yourself for?" he snorted. "Oliver Oliver, the scientific investigator, piddling around in a plain case of a cheap yegg job and a shooting fray! Man, there's none of your chemical and hifalutin' stuff here, like you used in the Mannly case! What do you want here?"

"Nothing—except to rubber." Oliver glanced over the store, full of antique treasures, then back toward the open door of the office at the rear of the shop. "Just what is the dope on it anyway, Tom?"

"Nothing particularly unusual about it," said the plain-clothes man, shutting up his notebook and buttoning his coat. He glanced at Mattox a second, then evidently dismissed him from serious consideration. "Here, come this way. He walked the short distance back to the partition, up the single high step to the raised floor of the office, and inside, waiting while Mattox and Oliver followed in silence. There Mattox merely looked on while the other two men talked.

"You can see the strongbox there," the detective explained, pointing to the spot with one sallow digit." In fact, it stands, you'll notice, where most any customer in the store can see it when the door in this partition is open. If you know anything about safes, Oliver, you'll note it's one of the ancient kind that Noah used on the ark to hold his records of the water soundings. So soft that if it wasn't as thick as Gibraltar, one could cut a hole through it with a cold-chisel if he had twenty-four hours to do it in. You'll note it's the old lock and key type of safe. You don't see 'em very much in this day and age, let alone such an odd-proportioned specimen as this old monstrosity. Why that one stands at the bottom button of my vest and look at the

depth and width of the thing, will you? Must'a been some country banker's pride and joy back in the days of Zachary Taylor or Millard Fillmore." He now transferred his gesture to a new spot. "Well, they found Jech lying here in this doorway where you're standing now, on the floor with his face down and his head hanging partway over that step that leads down into the curio store. It's plain, of course, that he came in—" the speaker waved his hand now to the right "—down that flight of steps that you see to the side o' this little office. Those steps lead up to his quarters. And it's plain that he found the man working on the safe by the light of that tall brass extension lamp over in the corner, or at least getting ready to do the actual work. The yegg shot him, and Jech tried to run out—prob'ly to the street. He got only as far as the door of this partition and there he dropped and died in his tracks."

There was silence for a moment, then Oliver ventured: "Do you suppose he tiptoed downstairs with a gun in his hand and his display of the weapon was what brought on his own death? Cracksmen usually aren't so nervous that they take a chance on murder if their opponent is unarmed and they can back him up against the wall and tie him up." Mattox, standing in silence nearby, realized only too well that this was a leading question of several that might determine whether amateur or professional had worked here in the silent hours of the night.

"It's likely," admitted the plain-clothes man ungrudgingly. "It's very likely that that was just about the way it happened. If Jech came down—which we know he did—he would hardly have come without a gun in his hands, and that's the very thing that could have gone a long way toward bringing on his own death. It would seem to indicate in that case that there was only one man on the job—that he knew he couldn't keep Jech covered and tie him up too. However, whatever the cause for his shooting Jech, we

know that he did shoot and shot straight, and he lifted Jech's rod out of his dying fingers and got out in a hurry the same way he came in."

"Which was how?" asked Oliver.

"Through that old rickety backyard window, if you care to step through this second partition and take a look at it. The intruder had probably come intending to jimmy it open, but he didn't even have to take his jimmy from his kit. The putty was all dried and loose; the window had been put in backwards at some time in the past, and the glass was even loose. One of the neighboring storekeeper's kids who has skinned over the backyard fence a few times after his ball, tells me that that window glass actually sung when an L-train went by." The plain-clothes man paused. "So the trusty jimmy didn't even have to be used. The back alley pirate simply took advantage of the fact that Jech was fearfully deaf—easy thing for anybody to learn—or else he waited till two L-trains nearly above his head were passing in opposite directions at the same moment. During the fearful roar and rattle he simply placed the sole of his foot against the glass and pushed it in. We know the putty was pretty rickety because the glass is only broken into three separate pieces from the pressure. We know he used his foot because some of the fine gray dust from the cemented back yard is implanted on the three pieces of glass where they come together. It's just a vague patch, of course; not well-defined enough to measure the actual foot that did it."

Mattox, who had been standing all this while near the door to the more rearward partition, took occasion at this juncture to step through it, into the tiny, dank dark room that had been cut off, by it, from the office. As the detective had said, one of two low windows both of which looked out on a dingy back yard, stood locked but minus pane or putty. A criss-cross of new white pine boards had been nailed across it, by the police, evidently to keep curious

boys from adventuring by way of the back yard into this scene of undoubted fascination to boys. A dusty pine chest stood near the paneless window, with its cover up, and containing some garden implements. But gardening must have long since ceased to be an avocation for curio dealers, here under the L, for the entire back yard was now of cement. Which also meant that no footprints could have been left as the intruder stood by this window in the dark, vaiting for the passage of trains so that he could push in the glass. An empty dog kennel lay tossed in one corner of this room, and a folded-up blanket covered with dog hairs indicated that at some time long gone an ancient and perhaps decrepit canine companion had lingered here and then passed on from this world. There was nothing more to be seen; so Mattox stepped back across the threshold into the office. He heard Oliver speaking.

"Well, whatever the intruder was, he was cool enough to get possession of a loaded gun and to take his own kit of valuable safe-blowing implements before clearing out. He left behind him only the simplest things that he could easily replace in any hardware store. That, I'd say, was a valuable psychological point."

He looked back queerly toward Dirk Mattox who now again stood in the rearward doorway; then again toward the detective who was stowing away his notebook in his hip pocket. "A couple of questions, Tom, before you beat it. What time did the murder take place? And just what tools were left on the floor? And what was the news story referring to in its mention of certain curious paraphernalia about making it impossible for Jech to 'feel' the operations on his safe?"

"Well," said the man Tom, "as to your first question, the murder took place at about two-ten this morning. The shot woke up several people in the vicinity around here, but the man who actually did notify the police had trouble in getting his phone to work, had to go to a neighbor's, and

it was probably twenty minutes—two-thirty—before the boys actually ambled over on a tour of investigation. They wasted a bit of time next door before one of 'em discovered that glass staved in. Lights were on by this time in various places around the block; so naturally they figured that this office being lighted up was just one more party that had been aroused. However, when they discovered that staved-in glass, they all piled in through the opening with their guns drawn, and found—Jech! Dead he was, quite naturally—shot through the left valve of the heart, you see—and he must have bled to death internally. I think that's what the coroner's physician said at headquarters this morning. And the fellow that did it was two—three—four miles away by that time."

"Gad," commented Oliver painfully, "he must have been either hardboiled or else mighty shaky in his trigger finger." Which comment, Mattox reflected bitterly without speaking, meant that a skillful cracksman who knew the penalty for being caught, or a nervous, distraught amateur on a strange errand, could have fired that shot.

"But I think you were asking," said the man in the brown tweed suit and derby hat, "about the tools that were found. Well, now the finer arts of his craft this prowler didn't use—or maybe didn't even intend to use. I don't know." He paused, dubiously. "We found a small auto jack, bright and new and apparently bought for the job itself, standing in readiness between the safe and the wall, ready to raise it up on that side; and scattered about within a few feet of the safe door itself a heavy sledge hammer, a broad cold chisel with tempered edge, and a rat-tail file."

"Hm," said Oliver. "Didn't he even try to use soup?"

"There's a funny complication about that," said the derby-hatted central office man. "Soup couldn't be used on this job, at least without destroying everything in the safe!"

"The devil you say!" said Oliver. He glanced curiously

toward the huge safe, and Mattox's eyes too followed his troubledly.

"Yes," said the man called Tom. "You may see in that next room—the one off the back yard—an old blanket with a lot of hairs on it, comprising a dog's bed. There evidently had been another blanket just like it, underneath it, because we found it cut up into about forty squares. A keen, sharpened pocket knife had been used—maybe sharpened for the very purpose; I don't know—it might even have been a razor—for the tough wool was too cleanly cut for the average scissors blades. But whatever tool was used there, the murderer had restored to his pocket before he fled the place later." Tom paused. "The squares o' wool were all neatly stacked over there by that partition cutting off the store. The brass floor lamp was standing as though he'd been operating under it, and the bulb was turned slightly so that part of the light fell on th' face of the safe an' the tools scattered about in front of it. I doubt whether at any time he put on the main lights in this ceiling. It might have caused a question from the street." He paused. "Well, as I say, we were able to connect up the auto jack found at the side of the safe, with the wool squares easy enough. It was evident that he intended to jack the safe up a couple of inches on each side for a minute, put about ten squares of the wool under each leg, let it down on these cushions, an' then commence what he was going to do with hammer and chisel."

"And that—was what?" asked Oliver glumly.

"Look here, Oliver," directed his official informant. The latter stepped over to the safe under discussion. "You've noted of course that this is an old lock and key safe. I don't think I personally know of an older type than this—and it was probably specially cast, for the old timers aren't as a rule quite so big and bulky as this. But note, Oliver, it's been in a fierce fire. Yes, I thought you'd notice that. See how that door has been warped, and even the frame-

work that holds it has buckled a bit? Fire'll do that even to iron and steel. Why, I saw the steel framework comprising the White City Amusement Park tower literally twisted into snakes an' ribbons once, just from the burning up of all th' wood that encased it. Now watch my pencil here, Oliver." With which injunction, the plain-clothes man thrust his pencil in at several of the more obvious points where the huge door had warped. The pencil, here at least, could pass directly between the edge of the door and the framework. He repeated the performance both on the side and at the bottom. At one point on the door's upper edge, he stooped over slightly and blew. The hollow sound of air rushing through, instead against, a surface, was audible to the two tense listeners in that little partitioned-off room. The plain-clothes man stood erect again. He drew his pencil entirely around the entire door and gave it three final emphatic taps. "There's only certain spots where she fits tight," he stated succinctly. "Everywhere else she's warped so that she don't even make a contact. And although she's locked tight enough, thanks to her steel bolt, it means—"

"That a nitroglycerine blast would only puff out of the gaps around the edge," put in Mattox eagerly. He had been a good student.

"Exactly," said the policeman, frankly surprised at the astuteness of this young onlooker who had been tagging along in the company of Oliver Oliver. "Yes, my young friend, and you too, Oliver, this old battle-ax of a safe is nitro-proof, believe it or not. A professional cracksman would see that at one glance. He would give up any attempts he might have in mind toward using nitro. Of course, to be sure, he could put a charge in so great that the holes wouldn't protect the door, but that would smash everything in the safe; might blow the whole room to smithereens; might even bring the house down. It's something that couldn't be calculated."

"Then," said Oliver quickly, "it was a professional who did it? A peterman, Tom?"

"No, I can't say that," said the detective quietly. "The conditions are exactly such as would'a made a peterman reason thus and so, an' would have compelled him simply to adopt the very measure that the rankest amateur would have adopted. See that steel plate?"

But long before this the eyes of both of his auditors had rested more than once on the big thick metal plate that, with a crude key-slot milled in it, was riveted directed over the spot where the lock must have been.

"This here plate," said Tom, disregarding grammar for scientific exactitude, "is steel, and thick. It's beeen drilled at each corner—then riveted only by four rivets over the site of the old lock. That lock probably got melted in the fire. Or even likely had to be chipped away. There ain't any protective metal to speak of under that plate. A newer and better lock has been put in, so's to operate the single steel bolt. But no unprotected lock can withstand the blow from a sledge hammer. Reach that lock, knock it with one smash to pieces, move the single sliding bolt inside with the fingers, and you're in the safe. And to reach that lock, to uncover it—for if it wasn't all exposed inside, this plate wouldn't have been put on with all that trouble—all you'd have to do would be to cut the two top rivets through—the top ones only, too—bend the plate down with a tool or a jimmy—say, f'r instance, the jimmy that didn't even have to be used on the window!—the plate wouldn't bend but the heads o' th' two lone soft iron rivets would give, from the leverage—and the lock'd be ready for a clean smash and then th' bolt in turn ready to be operated with the fingers."

Mattox strode over and kneeling down surveyed troubledly the plate. He turned to the others. "The warping of the door in the original fire has even made it impossible to

lay the protective plate on flat. There's plenty of room between the top of the plate and the safe to stick the edge of a cold-chisel. Soft iron rivets, are they?"

"Yes," said the detective, surveying this newcomer's zeal with some curiosity, and probably putting him down as one in the first throes of enthusiasm for the science of criminology. He flashed his bulls-eye pocket light directly on the right of the two rivet heads. "See that sharp glistening cut across the head o' that one? Made with the edge of the rat-tail file. Proved up that the rivet was not only iron, but soft iron. Might have indicated to the yegg the type of chisel to use. Or might have been just a preliminary experiment to see how hard to hit. But it shows exactly what he intended to do—what his tools were laid out for. With the safe jacked up an' then let down on four ten-ply cushions o' dog blanket, he was going to simply cut away the two top rivets an' walk inside that strongbox."

"Is a jack a regular part of a professional peterman's equipment?" asked Oliver blankly. But his question was not so blank as his expression.

"Every peterman is a peculiar sort o' mechanical artist in his own way," said the man Tom. "There's certain things like soup, in a rubber bag, that they all have. They all carry a few wedges for wedging wider the crack between the door an' the casing when conditions is just the opposite of this one—too tight even to get in their nitro. O' course they take out the wedge before they shoot their shot. They all carry a jimmy to take care o' windows, etc., and maybe a clip o' extra cartridges or a handful, in case they get cornered. They carry certain ordinary tools. But outside o' that, they got a fearful and wonderful assortment o' mechanical helps. And I've seen hundreds o' professional kits in my day, Oliver. I've seen nursing bottles accompanied by vacuum bottles containing warm milk, just to insure that kids won't start crying in the night. I've seen chloroform and sponges to use it with. I've seen dog

biscuit—with arsenic in 'em—for dogs. I've seen a rubber band holding a horrible glass eye to be used as a disguise. I've seen spectacles with powerful magnifying lenses wired on with German silver wire, for cracksmen that had reached an age where they needed special glasses for near work. Oh, I've seen everything. Each man develops his own working technique for applying the juice and overcoming his limitations. Now I'd say this fellow—granting that he was a professional—had been up against, in his day, a safe with a hole drilled in the bottom of it—a safe he couldn't blow; from that time on he was fixed to get a good feel of the bottom of every safe he tried, in case it was sitting flat on the floor, without any castors or rollers."

"Suppose," now asked Mattox in as unpretentious a manner as possible, "this job had been done—or rather projected—by some gangster in this neighborhood—some fellow who knew Jech might have made a good sale yesterday, but who didn't know particularly anything about cracking a safe except to chop his way inside while a deaf man slept upstairs. Wouldn't he have brought his own blankets for the cushioning job? Doesn't the absence of such indicate that a peterman, expecting to use nitro, did the job?"

"No, my friend," said the man Tom succinctly. "It indicates only that if it was an amateur trying forcible methods, he knew this dump well enough to know that there was plenty of cushioning stuff in it. If he didn't know about the old dog bed, he at least knew there was those many tapestries on the walls in there, stuck on only with thumbtacks; them velvet drapes hanging inside; those portieres hanging over that door to the head of the stairs leading down from Jech's quarters; old chairs with cushions; some of them small rugs hanging on that wire in the show window off the street. No, he'd have been a fool to try and lug bulky padding around the town at night. If you want to try deduction in connection with his being an amateur,

my friend, you can only deduce that if he was such, he came from a distance."

Mattox said nothing, picturing dejectedly a man leaving a comfortable residence in the late hours of the evening, armed with certain vital knowledge and a suitcase—packed tightly with what?—ostensibly to go to New Orleans. He pictured that man sitting unobtrusively in a convenient depot till a certain hour had arrived—his departure thence by the same way he came—and then what? He sighed deeply, and then proffered another question, seeing that his entrance with Oliver had made him *persona grata*, at least.

"Just how does a professional—or even an amateur—best carry a thing like a long sledge?" he asked.

"That's easy. A violin case would have been ideal. Or a simple suitcase, with the sledge laid in diagonally. Violin case in this district, with cabarets to the east, would have been perfect. Suitcase would have been just as much so—late traveller going to the depot or coming from it." Mattox nodded dejectedly. His spirits were low indeed.

"No," the man Tom was concluding, "thanks to this warped safe, there isn't much can be figured here as to whether some rank amateur in the neighborhood did it, or a professional peterman from the best circles of cracksmendom. There's only one thing sure: He'd made some study of the job because he knew Jech was deaf, and that Jech lived alone, or he wouldn't have prepared to actually cut through them two top rivets and smash the lock. For this method could have been heard through one thickness of ceiling." He paused. "Anybody, though, could have tried Jech out with a purchase, and learned that he could hardly hear spoken words."

He paused a moment and then went on.

"And the very main thing which I haven't spoken of yet, and which didn't get into the early papers, is that there's been a gang working on the new subway curve at 22nd and State where the new State Street subway is to

swing around and rise up above ground here to connect with the L-road. You can feel the steam-chisel hitting that stratum of hard rock that's known to crop up at this point in Chicago. They've been quiet for a little while, but they'll be starting in again most any minute. Now the man —call him an amateur if you want—who investigated this job must have seen that an underground gang was working at the corner and found out from the foreman or somebody around here that it worked nights. Or else he could have read in the papers how the storekeepers in the district were complaining against the city for damages to their plaster walls and bric-a-brac. If 'twas a professional —even if he lit here from out of town—only armed with a map and information that the proprietor was deaf—as he stood here last night, scratching his chin and seeing that he couldn't blow this old can in a thousand years without blowing up the house too—he must have felt the blows and repeated blows. Sort of shocks they were, in the very earth. And it occurred to him right on the spot that all he needed to do was to pad the feet of that old safe a bit, and pound to his heart's content, for that padding would be just enough to lessen the shock of his work so's it would about equal the shocks coming from that steam-chisel gang up at the corner. Yes, I'd say he was sitting very pretty."

"Cutting gang see anything suspicious?" asked Oliver quietly.

"They were down underneath most of the night," said Tom. "You'll note the roof of where they're working is supporting the State Street surface car tracks so as to keep traffic from being disturbed. Just the little shanty giving entrance on the corner, with a red lantern on it. At that hour the foreman and all were working away down below. We've checked them all painstakingly, one against the other. They're quite O. K."

"That's good." Oliver scratched his chin. "If the real

pounding from the subway work didn't wake Jech, what woke him, do you figure, seeing that this fellow didn't even reach the rivet-cutting stage of his job?"

"A hunch beyond all doubt," laconically replied the plain-clothes man. "A tradesman's hunch. And a bad hunch it was for poor Jech, too."

"Do you know what was in the safe?"

"No," said the other. "Jech, of course, had some secret place to keep his key to that safe at night. Where it is we haven't located yet. We will, of course, all right. The chief has ordered a careful inventory of everything in it, when we get hold of the key. The contents may, in fact, help us to rivet attention on the right suspect. Or to suspect somebody that we don't dream of now."

"You've got suspects already?" Oliver asked.

"A dozen," said the other quickly. "A dozen right here in this burg, and half of them rounded up already. When this bird killed Jech, he made the best play of his life—that is, of course, from the point of view of *his* game—for he killed the only man that might have identified him later and sent him over the road. It indicates the possibility, in a sense, that he was working with his mask down, or maybe without any mask on at all. And Jech, tiptoeing downstairs, got a good look at his face. And he knew Jech had had a good look. And so knowing he could be identified, he croaked Jech, which put a stop for all time on any mugging of him next day in the police station."

"So you can't venture," Oliver pressed, "as to whether it was some professional cracksman whom the police knew, or some amateur of whose identity Jech might have had an idea?"

"How can I, Oliver?" said the plain-clothes man hopelessly. "Only a rank amateur would come to do a chisel job. And only a skillful peterman would have seen that a can like this couldn't be blown, and would have had to do a chisel job or none at all. No, Oliver, this is one case in a

thousand; it wouldn't happen again in ten years. Complicated by a deaf man, the roar o' L-trains outside, and a subway gang working all night in hard rock at the corner. I tell you, with all my experience, I wouldn't be so bold as to venture. The only thing I *can* venture is what actually happened, regardless of who pulled it. The intruder brought some kind of a kit, some kind of a conveyor of tools, soup, or what not. And when Jech swooped down on him, and he either killed Jech from sheer cold-bloodedness, plain nervousness, or from a desire to prevent identification, he grabbed his kit or what there was of it that wasn't strewn around the floor, and got out of that rear window without even taking time to pick up the sledge, jack, chisel and rat-tail file. That shows he went in a hurry.

"But there was reason enough for his taking Jech's gun, if Jech had one," the detective continued, "even though this intruder had one of his own too. Self-preservation—the law that's always working even when the normal action of the mind is suspended. Self-preservation. For a professional always has a subconscious picture of himself being cornered by a policeman and needing ammunition—and more ammunition. And an amateur has the same terrified picture when he accidentally pulls an unexpected murder." The plain-clothes man paused. "Well, I've got to ramble." He buttoned up his tweed coat. "Got lots to do today—this isn't the only piece of crime in Chicago, you know. It's up to the chief to sweat all the suspects he can get his hands on, I guess, since he's got no direct identification so far."

"One minute, Tom," said Oliver, "and you can go—with my blessing to boot. You've been talking here all the time about one man doing the job. How do you know it wasn't two? And how about fingerprints?"

"Answering your first question," said Tom, "I'd only need to call your attention, Oliver, to the well-established fact that whenever two or more crooks pull a job, they put

a 'lighthouse'—that's what we police call a lookout—at the point of greatest danger. Now in this case, the point of greatest danger ain't the street—it's that flight of steps leading down in this office from Jech's quarters upstairs. And if there'd been two men, there'd certainly have been one on guard covering that danger spot. And if that danger spot had been covered, I think this thing would have turned into a bloodless stickup job rather than a killing."

He paused and then went on. "No, there wasn't anybody on guard. That was the trouble. If there had been, the fellow'd never have been surprised, and if he hadn't been surprised I don't think there'd have been a shooting. No, it looks clear to me that the lone worker was so engaged in his preparations against the safe that he was surprised absolutely silly when he looked up and saw Jech covering him—or else trying to tiptoe through to the street and call an officer." He paused. "Again, Oliver, it's always been my experience that when there's more than one man on a killing job, there's likely to be at least one person who keeps a cool enough head to gather up the tools that contain evidence that in a court trial can electrocute 'em both. It's the one-man operator who always takes panic. And this fellow flew." He paused again. "But you asked about fingerprints, I think. The tools are carefully locked away under seal in the chief's office while Creel, the f. p. expert of the department, is working day and night with his full force on that South Chicago bank case. Nobody's handled 'em. We hope to get Creel back by late today or tonight, and then we'll have action. It's a complicated job, of course, to bring out all the prints with powder, photograph 'em, enlarge 'em, and count up the loops, deltas and whorls and get the official formula. And if this bird wore rubber or leather gloves, well there won't be any! One thing's certain —so long as there's no finger-print report no suspect's lawyer can get him out on habeas corpus on the plea that his fingerprints don't tally."

Oliver nodded slowly, evidently digesting this evidence of strategy on the part of the police department. Then he suddenly fired a surprising question at the other. "Did you by any chance find a very, very short red-grease pencil in Jech's business suit when you searched his clothes? A stub of a red-grease pencil, Tom?"

The detective stared. He looked oddly at Oliver. "What in—" he began. Then he laughed. "So you examined the list of his pocket contents over at headquarters?"

Oliver shook his head with a half smile. "No; I'm really serious. Did you find a red-grease pencil stub? If you did, it may have a bearing on your case."

"Well," replied the plain-clothes man bewilderedly, "we *did* find a stub about three-quarters of an inch long. Now—what about it? It's insignificant; but how did you get hep?"

Oliver smiled. He pointed close by to where a gaudy lithographed calendar hung upon the wall. It portrayed, in rather exaggerated pictorial form, the epochal trans-Pacific flight of the young British aviator, Hubert Tipton-Couch, in which the great gulf of black waters between San Francisco and Shanghai, China, had been spanned by the intrepid English war-ace who had not slept for two nights and two days as his plane, on that memorable June 12 and 13, 1931—exactly three months before—had covered the greatest non-stop flying distance known to man. The artist who had depicted the scene had drawn somewhat on his imagination, for he had shown the great single-motored monster, joint product of Britain's leading war-plane designers, swooping down out of the night into an infinite cluster of brilliantly lighted pagodas with Chinamen in the foreground, in colorful Oriental dress, holding hands outstretched toward it, whereas in reality the world knew how the courageous Tipton-Couch, missing Japan by hundreds of miles as even Columbus missed India, had landed on a lonely beach of China itself but made the world's record for all time.

Mattox, directing his own scrutiny to whatever Oliver was trying to call attention to, saw that it was not at this apparent evidence of the belief of calendar manufacturers in melodramatic situations making for calendar sales, that Oliver was indicating, much less the more likely suggestion that both artist and lithographer had set to work on their color-stones the moment that the radio had announced that Tipton-Couch had been sighted over the Liu-Kiu Islands and must perforce land somewhere in China. Nor was Oliver calling attention particularly to the calendar leaf itself, covering the month of December, yet four months in the offing from the present date. For the latter's words showed that his cryptic utterance pivoted about but one fine detail of that leaf which was itself only a detail of the whole.

"Just why Jech drew a red-grease pencil circle around the figure seventeen on that calendar leaf, four months off, neither you fellows nor I know," he was saying. "But I will say that I'm struck by the fact that it's almost as neat a free-hand circle as a born artist could draw." With a gesture of his head, he beckoned the detective and Mattox over. "Do you fellows see how the ends of the circle come together exactly?"

The two nodded slowly. As an example of the marking off of a future date to constitute a reminder of something, it was perfect. The circle was almost as neat as though drawn by a compass.

"You will find," remarked Oliver, "if you ever care to investigate, that a circle made on a wall, or a box, or a blackboard, or any flat object, if an ordinary pencil or crayon is used and seized near the middle, will be not only elliptical but also the ends will overlap instead of meet. And on the other hand you will find that if a very short stub is used—try it yourself—the pressure being much nearer to the finger tips and more direct, will coördinate the wrist muscles so that a more perfect circle always will

be formed, and likewise the ends can be brought together. Experiment on this any time you're in doubt."

"You're good, Oliver," said the detective, chuckling. "But what made you jump to the matter of Jech's pockets?"

"Merely a speculation," said the other lightly. "Grease pencil marks fade as do all other marks. This is bright and vivid, however. And it was made in order to fasten a vital date of some sort in memory. Likewise, it was drawn with a stub. Now—so long as you found such a stub—I suggest that you investigate Jech's life and letters, and see after all if you can find anything connected with the 17th of this coming December. That's all."

"It is a funny thing, isn't it?" the detective admitted. "Somebody remarked the fact of the red circle this morning, but it was dropped as of no consequence." He stared at the figure seventeen and at the neat red circle around it, his mind apparently now reflecting upon the salient facts that a red-grease pencil stub had been enumerated among the contents of Jech's pockets, and that there were some natural laws governing geometrical figures and the lengths of drawing implements used in producing them. He took off his derby and dusted it with a quick motion of his pocket handkerchief. "I'll pass on your 17th of December idea to old O'Toole of the 22nd Street station, Oliver. He looks on himself as the world's greatest sleuth, and it'll give the old boy a wrinkle or two on his brain. I'd like to make him work for a while and get nowhere." He laughed curtly. "Well, I've got to go. Lost too much time as it is, gassing with a curiosity hound like you." And this time he stood not, as he had before, on the order of his going, but went, and very definitely too. For the two men suddenly found themselves alone.

As the footsteps of the other echoed rapidly down the store and out to the sidewalk, Mattox gazed at Oliver with a dull, pained look in his own eyes. "Not much satisfac-

tion," he said weakly. "It was probably L. M. after all; but it's equally probable that it was S. What in Heaven's name am I going to do?"

Oliver heaved a long sigh. He shook his head dolefully. "I'm awfully sorry, old man, that we're left in such doubt. It's really as Tom says, the thousandth-and-one case. Now he's as good a man as there is in the department on safe robbery jobs, and you yourself have had an earful this morning so that you can interpret for yourself the technical observations he's made. Even from my own very limited experience with burglaries, I'd say it's rare that some more definite indications are not left behind than there were here." He paused, thinking. "I did my best, though, old scout, for your sake, to draw a herring across the trail. I thought I might get Tom to wearing out his think-tank on the little demonstration about the red circle, but the case is so obviously a simple burglary job that he fails to react to my injection of mysterious dates and motives."

"Yes," said Mattox, "I noticed that all he was interested in was to foist your idea off on this chief at the 22nd Street station." He paused, with a sidewise glance out of his eye which showed him that the single patrolman left to guard the place was out on the front sidewalk, and added: "I'm wondering what's coming out when they get that finger-print data? Thank God—I hate to say it, Oliver—but I'm thinking of the little girl—but if it was S. they'll never in a thousand years get close enough to him in their suspicions to hook up the prints to him."

"I agree with you," said Oliver with a sigh, "but don't forget if it was your crazy rash friend, McC., they've got *his* all nicely tabulated in the prison records. Still," he added, as he evidently noticed Mattox's spirits fall low, low indeed, "McC. would have worn a pair of rubber dish-washer's gloves or old kid gloves if he never did anything else. I'd say, old top, that there lies the real answer to your problem—and not here. If the department finds

freshly made fingerprints on the tools, that will indicate S. beyond any doubt; and if they find none, that will point with equal certainty to McC."

"Yes, there's possibilities there," said Mattox glumly, "even if we can't get hold of the prints by any subterfuge."

"I'll manage that somehow," Oliver assured him quietly.

There was nothing said for a few moments. Then Oliver turned towards the door in the matchboard partition. "I'll just have a brief look about in the front of the store so long as we're here," he said. And stepping down the single step over whose threshold, Jech, as had been described to them, had been found dead, he went forward in the store and left Mattox alone.

The latter, standing with folded arms, stood staring dumbly at the safe, around the ceiling, at the lithographed calendar on the wall, trying to picture the scene of last night—that scene witnessed by but two persons on earth, one of whom now lay dead in the police morgue. But try as he might, with all the actual stage here before his eyes, he could not insert in his well-defined image of the man who had fired and fled, the man's face. He came closer to the safe, and, squatting down on the rickety flooring, stared at the steel plate which guarded the no-doubt exposed lock mechanism with its four powerful rivets, and then at the cleanly eaten bite in the upper right hand one which showed that the rat-tail file had proclaimed it to be soft iron and not steel at all. "Was it McCracken or was it Silverthorne?" he groaned to himself. "Was it the one or the other? If only I could know!"

Leaning sideways, his eyes became cognizant, in the ancient paint, of a long faint scratch which appeared, from its connection with the rivet head, its newly glistening thread-like aspect, and its circular downward sweep, to have been made by the sharp point of the file as the instrument glanced off once from the rounded protuberance

into which it was making a test cut. And it was but natural, therefore, that those same eyes should follow that scratch clear to the bottom edge of the safe, and that their owner should lower them the better to examine the floor to see whether the instrument had plunged itself into the wood. He found nothing, as might have been expected. But now that his eyes had been brought almost to a level with the floor beneath the safe, they glimpsed for the first time something white in the semi-gloom beneath the big iron box. Twisting his head about, and lowering it still further, the better to peer far underneath, he was now able to make out fully what it was: a white piece of thick paper, standing partly against the rear left leg of the safe. In fact, it seemed as though it were something that had been dropped on the floor and had sailed, much as an airplane wing, directly beneath the ancient depository.

Getting down on his hands and knees, and drawing back his coat and shirt sleeves he inserted his bare arm underneath far enough so that his fingers grasped the piece of paper.

Bringing it out he stared bewilderedly at it. Now, for the first time, he recalled that when he had visited Jech the day before to bargain for the return of the Vindelinus de Spira, the man had just finished sweeping painstakingly out from under this same safe, and he recalled, too, how the curio-shop proprietor had dragged the long-handled brush and dustpan clear into the front store.

An inspection of his forearm convinced Mattox of the thoroughness of that sweeping out, for the white skin was scarcely soiled. Hence it was plain that this piece of thick paper must have passed underneath the safe between the previous day and the present moment.

The most surprising feature about the document, however, was that its one face was blank, and its other was covered with quaint, black Chinese hieroglyphics made by the usual fine brush. And it seemed to suggest strongly a

receipt, some directions, perhaps a formula, maybe a message, for its margin was wide and the characters covered only two brief columns in the center of the paper.

It was not surprising, therefore, that as he stood with it in his hands a wave of illumination swept over him—a wave at least fraught with many and strange possibilities. Again his mind centered itself upon the previous day and upon the veiled woman—particularly upon her visit to the Chinese Wah Hung Fung, the man with "hlundeds an' hlundeds of blooks—old blooks an' new blooks," the man who "leads Englise, Flench, and Germin." In short, a third possibility suddenly had entered the enigma.

CHAPTER XIX

WARNING OR THREAT?

AS Mattox stood in front of the safe with the piece of Chinese writing in his hands, Oliver appeared in the doorway. Excitedly, Mattox turned to his friend. "Look, old Double-O!" he said tensely. "Look what I found underneath the safe! What do you make of it?"

Oliver came quickly forward and took the paper. After one scrutiny of its black hieroglyphics, its thick, creamy texture, he stared up at Mattox. "You found it under—"

"Back underneath the safe," broke in the other, "and the peculiar part about it is that yesterday when I came here to see Jech he had just finished sweeping out from under there with a long-handled brush and dustpan. I saw it with my own eyes. And look at my forearm—hardly a fleck of dust on it. It means simply that this has gone under there since then—and very probably last night."

A low whistle escaped Oliver. "Then it looks," he said quietly, "as though our friend, Wah Hung Fung, recipient of a visit from the disappointed feminine purchaser of the Vindelinus, has been mixed up actively rather than passively in this thing, too." He stood for a second with the paper in his hands, and then went forward to a position in front of the safe.

Stooping slightly, he let the piece of Chinese writing fall vertically from his fingers. It dropped fluttering to the floor and then, most oddly, shot in under the safe, where it disappeared completely. Oliver fumbled underneath the strongbox with his arm and again repeated the performance, allowing the paper to drop carelessly as before. Again, close to the floor, it was sucked suddenly and surprisingly underneath the iron safe.

Wetting his fingers in his mouth, he stooped and placed the moist digits between the floor and the base of the strongbox.

Then he smiled. "There's a draft, all right, old man," he announced; "a well-defined draft scooting along the floor. Quite aside from that paneless window in the back room, probably every window and door in this old shebang leaks enough so that there always is a regular little northeaster going on close to the floor. That explains why the thing sails underneath the safe each time, and particularly why it sailed under last night after whoever dropped it here had kicked in the pane and added to the air currents. But who dropped it? Did Wah Hung Fung take steps to secure for his collection the Vindelinus de Spira? There's the big question now. And what formula or directions does this give? Does it say: Use one cold chisel and one sledge-hammer, combined with so many kilo-ergs of elbow grease, at two-ten in the morning?"

Dirk Mattox, lost in a brown study, his face suddenly alight at the strange possibilities that were mirroring themselves on his brain, made no reply.

Whereupon Oliver spoke again: "Well, old man, let's go. There's nothing more to be seen here. Our next step is to search out my friend, Augustus Schudel, professor of Oriental languages at Northwestern University, and see what this formula is. Then we'll be somewhere, at any rate. But just now, with nothing but a few facts about a chisel, a sledge, a jack and a rat-tail file, we're—well—decidedly nowhere." He turned to the inner store. "Come, old man, let's be off."

Mattox followed him silently out to the street. There a few score feet from the store Oliver led the way to the entrance of the elevated road, and within twenty minutes they were thundering out to the northern city limits. Not much was said on the way, each man being absorbed in his own thoughts.

Across the green campus they threaded their way, and a crimson-sweatered student with a pipe in his mouth directed them to the faculty building where a student doortender directed them in turn to Professor Schudel's quarters.

The door upon which Oliver rapped was opened by a roly-poly little man with yellow hair brushed back into a fierce pompadour, and an equally yellow mustache and short yellow beard. He was clad in a smoking jacket and was puffing away on a huge pipe. Inside, on the table in a cozy study, furnished with an extensive series of bookcases and a student's hammered-copper lamp, as well as several comfortable-looking chairs, lay a huge volume which the professor evidently had been poring over through his hornshell-rimmed glasses.

He recognized Oliver at once. "Herr Oliver!" he exclaimed. "And what brings you around to see me this time?"

"Good morning, Professor Schudel," said Oliver. "Let me introduce Mr. Mattox, a friend of mine."

A few seconds later they were ensconced in the professor's study. Oliver withdrew from his vest pocket the paper which Mattox had found and handed it to Schudel.

"Professor, we've come out here to the university to ask you for a translation of this formula or receipt or set of directions or whatever it is. Something—well—something involved in a criminal case. That's all I'm at liberty to tell you just now." He paused. "You will give me a translation of it, professor?"

"Indeed, Herr Oliver, yes."

The professor adjusted his glasses on his nose and looked at the Chinese writing. He went carefully over it, his eyes running down the two columns of vertical marks several times, his lips moving slightly. At last he looked up. "It looks to me like a threat, or a warning," he remarked. "And I would not call it a formula or a receipt. It—but you shall judge for yourself. It says: 'And I say to you

that the workings of Fate are as the web of a spider, and you shall plunge headlong into those same pits which you dig for others!' "

The two men were all attention. Oliver asked the professor to repeat the words once more; then he himself repeated them as he took the paper back from the other's fingers. " 'And I say to you,' " he quoted, " 'that the workings of Fate are as the web of a spider, and you shall plunge headlong into those same pits which you dig for others.' "

The professor nodded solemnly. "You have it correctly," he said. "It is in the most simple Chinese language—the most simple words."

Oliver rose. Mattox followed suit. "Thank you, professor," Oliver said. "I'm greatly obliged to you. I may later be able to tell you more of the thing."

Outside on the campus, Oliver turned to Mattox, a frown of puzzlement on his face. "It's certainly a warning or a threat," he emphasized. "Also it seems far-fetched to believe that Jech, in spite of his big knowledge of things exotic, knew Chinese and that a warning of this nature would be sent to him, although a mystery man, as he was, might have any sort of a bizarre past. If he did know Chinese, did he send that warning to Wah Hung Fung? Or did Wah Hung Fung send that warning to Jech? Or—"

"Or, which is the most acceptable theory in the whole tangle," put in Mattox quickly, "what other Oriental sent that warning to Wah Hung Fung? And why was it in Wah's clothing last night, taking it for granted that its presence at the scene of the crude safe-opening attempt and the murder proves conclusively that Chinatown's big king—the man who has 'hlundeds an' hlundeds of blooks new and old'—who 'leads Englise, Flench, an' Germin'—was down in that basement shop in the early hours of the morning?"

"It's possible," agreed Oliver. "It's more than possible. And it simply makes our case all the more complex. There's

McCracken, who is the most likely possibility—sorry, old man, that I make you wince. There's Silverthorne, a second possibility. And now there's this deeply mysterious Wah Hung Fung who is the third. It was one of the three. And whichever it was, that one must—" He stopped, and led the way in silence to the cars. "Well, this doesn't get us anywhere. I've got to see a man on a mighty important case this morning. When we disband in the Loop, you can rejoin me at my office at—say—noontime, and I'm willing to take the bull by the horns this afternoon."

Mattox was puzzled by the other's reference to taking the bull by the horns, but he decided to ask no questions. So when they reached the Loop, and Oliver left the car at Wells Street to keep his appointment, Mattox went on straight around and was soon entering his office in the Ellsworth Building. There, letting himself in, he found that a goodly quantity of mail had been dropped through the slot in the door during his absence.

CHAPTER XX

SOME STARTLING INFORMATION

GOING to his desk, Mattox opened several of the letters listlessly, and smoothing them out he laid them at the side in a pile. The last one he perused a little more closely than the others. Pinned to the top of the sheet, which bore the name of some uptown rooming house with sufficient identity to have a name, was a little want ad clipped from the morning papers—the same want ad, in fact, which he himself had inserted. It read:

> Wanted: Young man to do office work and manage details of small specialty office while owner goes about town getting orders for his specialty. Wages $15 a week. Apply by letter only to Mattox, Room 403, Ellsworth Bldg.

And written below on the white sheet in clear, flowing handwriting, with a pronounced trace here and there of personality, was the answer:

> DEAR SIR: Ré your ad in to-day's paper:
>
> Am a college graduate, with a good deal of experience in business. Can even operate a typewriter and keep books. But am in a funny position. Just arrived in Chicago three or four days ago, and am not in a position to furnish references such as every business man seems to require. And I might as well get this clear now, rather than later.
>
> I need work badly, and am so anxious to demonstrate the qualities of youth, energy, and enthusiasm in me, that if you're interested I'll call to see you on the following proposition: Eleven dollars a week instead of the fifteen dollars you're offering, until such time as you're satisfied that I'm worth more to you.
>
> Very truly yours,
> THOMAS STEEVER.

"Now that's a frank, open letter!" commented Mattox slowly. "That fellow is willing to gamble his time and energy against a paltry eleven dollars a week! It looks to

me unequivocally the best of the lot." Whereupon he raised the receiver and rang the number of "The Parkside," the name that was shown printed at the top of the stationery.

Getting the number Mattox asked for Mr. Thomas Steever. It would almost seem that the latter individual had been camping close to the instrument, for a youthful masculine voice transferred itself to the phone after the first "hello!"

"This is Mr. Mattox, whose ad you answered," said Mattox slowly. "Can you call late to-day at room No. 403 Ellsworth Building to see me?"

"Late this afternoon?" said the man at the other end of the telephone, not without a visible trace of anxiety. "I'll—I'll start at once. I'll be there inside of a half hour."

"All right," said Mattox, smiling for the first time that day. "I'll be here. Don't forget the number: Ellsworth Building, room No. 403." Then he hung up, commenting to himself: "That fellow is a live wire. He won't even take a chance on the grass growing under his feet."

A half hour, or, exactly, twenty-nine minutes later, the door of the tiny office opened, and in walked a young man who was clad in a neat but cheap-looking checked suit, and a green plaid cap. He had on a pair of brightly polished tan shoes, and a pair of tan gloves—all new. His face was cleanly shaven, yet it was a trifle white, a trifle drawn, a trifle hungry-looking. He marched in with a devil-may-care attitude that did not match with the disconsolate look in his eyes.

Glancing at the occupied desk he said: "Mr. Mattox?"

"Yes; Mr. Steever, I suppose? Have a seat."

The newcomer dropped into a chair, the new shoes creaking as he walked. He said nothing for a moment, whereupon Mattox spoke. He outlined briefly the simple work that was necessary in the offices of the Mattox Noiseless Platen for Typewriters, and then waited curiously to see what the other had to say. This was the first time in his

life he had ever hired anyone, and the experience was just a little perplexing to him. He began to appreciate for the first time the psychological insight that must be possessed by the hiring agents of big corporations.

The newcomer heard him through and then spoke, eagerly, tensely. "Then I can handle the work," he declared firmly and confidently. "And as I said in my letter, I'm willing to go on for eleven dollars instead of fifteen. I can get by on that amount, you see. I—" He stopped in embarrassment. "I might as well tell the truth. I've—I've been knocking around the country for a long, long time, but I've suddenly awakened to the fact that it's time to call a halt—to start in, even if in a small way. So here I am. I haven't a reference on earth, and if you demand any I've got to walk out of here.

"I struck Chicago without a sou," he went on, "and since then have had some pretty good luck—enough to get this new outfit. A woman in a North Side hotel paid me fifty dollars for some specialized information that she advertised for, and which I was the only one able to give. And now I'm following my luck up. I've been frank with you, because I've got no references. And now, sir, what's your answer?"

"Frankness is a quality I've always liked," replied Mattox. "Take off your hat, and hang it on the hook. We'll pass up the references; also the matter of reduced wages. We'll figure your time as starting from this morning. Now look at this ledger here, which shows the places where my noiseless platens are sent out on trial. Wherever there's a blue check mark, that means the consignee has accepted it. So you'll make out a bill and an envelope on the typewriter. Over in the corner of the desk are my blank bill heads. The envelopes are in that cabinet."

Then he proceeded to show the newcomer in detail the exact procedure to be followed. The other grasped it quickly, instantly, and in short order was seated at the

typewriter making out neat bills. So Mattox, with a last look around, seized his hat and left, pausing a moment in the door.

"If anybody calls for me this afternoon, Steever," he ordered, "just say I'll be back toward evening. You'll have enough work to keep you the rest of the day. And I'll give you more work and show you more details when I come back about five o'clock."

"That fellow is all right," Mattox said to himself going down in the elevator. "And as to references, there's nothing to steal anyway. He probably came out of some house of correction."

It was but a block to the Manhattan Building which housed Oliver Oliver, and Mattox found that debonair young man seated in his swivel chair with his hat on, and a huge blue-steel gun lying out on the desk in front of him.

When Mattox entered the office, Oliver slipped the gun in his coat pocket. "Well, I've been waiting for you," he said. "While you've been gone, I've had a photostat made of that entire piece of Chinese writing, and we're going on to the Honorable Wah Hung Fung's—or, in plain American nomenclature, Mr. Wah's—with it to get a translation of it from his own precious self. And I'll delegate you to watch his slant eyes while he's reading. And to guard against any adroit Chinese highbinder work due to the fact that we know something—" He tapped significantly on the coat pocket in which he had secreted the gun.

They reached Archer Avenue a half hour later. As they neared No. 1950, Mattox pointed to a taxicab standing out in front, and as they came within a short distance from it, the same veiled woman who had on the previous day figured in the quarrel with Jech ran down the steps and flung herself into the machine.

At once Mattox turned excitedly to his companion. "That's the same one," he whispered. "Same clothing, same walk, same hat, same veil. She's the veiled woman who quarreled with Jech yesterday."

Oliver stared after the departing cab which was turning northward. Then he thrust his hands into his pockets and turned hastily to his companion.

"Then come!" he urged quickly. "We'll have to leg it in the rear until we can flag another bus. We might as well find out here and now who the lady is."

Together the two sprinted along, and a block farther were successful in hailing another machine which was going crosswise to the first. Jumping in, Oliver pointed to the bright yellow one ahead. "Follow that machine," he ordered the chauffeur. He carelessly flicked aside his vest, exposing his superbrilliant private detective badge.

This proved more than sufficient for such an order, and soon they were bowling speedily along, perhaps a block and a half behind the machine containing the veiled woman. Over through the dilapidated South Side they went, across the river, through the boarding-house district of Dearborn Avenue, and eastward on Ontario, where the machine stopped at last at the entrance of the Ontario Hotel at the first car-line. There the woman dismounted and, paying her chauffeur, disappeared inside the doors of the hostelry.

A quarter block behind, Oliver paid off his own chauffeur, and then, after a reasonable wait, led the way into the foyer of the Ontario and up to the clerk's desk. The veiled woman had by this time gone to her room. At the desk he and Mattox were quite alone, and again he pulled aside his vest, exposing his famous "drag."

"I must request you," he said with a half-stifled yawn, "to allow me to see the name of the veiled lady who just entered here two or three minutes ago. She may or may not be the party I want to have an interview with."

The clerk stared at him, then spun the register around and ran his finger down a column of several days previous. "You're on the wrong tack, I hope," he declared fervently. "We don't want any reputation for harboring police characters here. Just take your look."

Where his finger stopped, Oliver fixed his gaze. So, too,

did Mattox. The name written there in bold, daring, feminine handwriting said simply: Sadie Hippolyte, Cleveland, Ohio.

Oliver looked up with an ingenuous smile. "I beg pardon," he informed the clerk, "but I've evidently made a mistake. No harm done, I hope. No need of mentioning the thing to your guest even." And he turned to his companion. "Come, Bill; let's go. Bum lead after all."

On the outside he started to speak, but stopped, staring at the astounded face of his companion. Mattox drew him excitedly over to the nearest lamp-post where they were secure from even the ear of a passing pedestrian. He spoke quickly, hurriedly, triumphantly:

"Oliver Oliver, hold yourself together while I spring some startling information! If there's any doubt that that lady in there knows the whole technique, new and old, of cracking a safe and when not to try to use 'soup,' and all the rest of the tricks of that game, remove it from your mind altogether. I grew up on the same street with that female—Illinois Street. I have seen her a dozen times testify in a criminal trial of several years back. It happens that she's using her maiden name—Sadie Hippolyte. As for her knowledge concerning safes and the cracking of them, she was married legally to one safe-blower, no other but poor Luke McCracken, and she's the one that jobbed him in order to run away with another one, Slim Jim Landers, who was later killed in a Detroit hi-jacking job. In other words, Oliver, she's the same double-dealing female who ditched one safe-blower, with out-and-out perjured testimony, to run away with a cleverer one yet.

"And now," he added after a moment's pause, "old man, who do you think went to Jech's shop to blow his safe, found it couldn't be done, tried desperately to pull off a chisel job instead, and wound up by killing Jech himself?"

CHAPTER XXI

MR. WAH HUNG FUNG SPEAKS

AT the excited words of Dirk Mattox, Oliver stared at him bewilderedly. "The ex-wife of McCracken"—he began.

"Exactly," Mattox interrupted. "She was in that criminal case in court several times, and on *her* perjured testimony *my* truthful testimony about my watch was controverted." Then he launched into a short explanation of the trial which he had not seen fit to include in his earlier exposition of the facts.

"Sadie Hippolyte was the daughter of a bad gunman of a tough gang," he went on; "in fact, her father ultimately was shot dead in a holdup. Even as a boy I remember her well. Luke married her, and she later fell for Slim Jim Landers and got rid of Luke, who was working and playing straight then, by sending him over the road for the Hempstead burglary. Oh, she's a bad egg all right, and a heartless one!

"But what's she doing in Chicago?" he added. "What's her game anyway? How is she mixed up in the matter of the Vindelinus de Spira?"

Oliver stared down at the sidewalk for several minutes. "This discovery," he declared at length, "makes all the more imperative our little visit to Wah Hung Fung. Woman though she is, her marital experiences, as you've outlined them, show that she knows plenty about safes and the opening of them; and her being mixed up with this Wah shows, too, that she and the Chinese book fancier may have been working hand in glove in some way, and are now at cross purposes. At any rate I think we can safely leave her here for the present, for she's probably going to stay

in Chicago till she gets an opportunity to put her hands on that Vindelinus de Spira, lying in the dead man's safe. So come!"

On the way back to Archer Avenue the two men talked about the sudden discovery, discussing it in its various ramifications. Soon they were climbing up the steps of the brownstone residence of Wah Hung Fung at No. 1950 Underneath the green-silk Chinese banner, Oliver pushed the bell. A long silence ensued; then a soft-footed Oriental answered the door.

"I wish," said Oliver quietly, "to speak to Mr. Wah Hung Fung."

"You will step in," said the servant deferentially. He motioned behind the vestibule entrance to a splendidly appointed room, showing everywhere the evidences of the vague, mysterious Orient—the land far across the seas. He conducted them to heavy teakwood chairs, then disappeared through a side door.

A moment later a tall Chinese, clad in rich Oriental robes, his black mustaches long and silky, his eyes framed in hornshell-rimmed spectacles, wearing a tiny green-and-gold skullcap, entered the room. He stood in the doorway and then came forward as Oliver and Mattox rose.

"You wished, gentlemen, to see me?"

Oliver nodded. "If you please, Mr. Wah. Oliver Oliver is my name. My friend here is Mr. Dirk Mattox. We would like a few words with you." He fumbled in his pocket and withdrew the photostat of the piece of paper that had borne the Chinese words written on it. "As a big dignitary in our so-called Chinatown, we thought that possibly you would be willing to translate the words on this photographic copy of a certain original locked at present in my vault." And he thrust it forward.

Mattox, watching the tall Chinese cautiously, could see the look of keen surprise—better, recognition—flood over his saffron face. His lean hand trembled a bit as he took

the thing up, and his eyes rested troubledly upon it, yet he made no attempt to render the requested translation. At last his eyes roved to Oliver and traveled curiously, keenly, up and down the latter's strongly built frame.

"This, gentlemen, is nothing but a photographic copy of a page of wisdom from the bound works of an old Chinese philosopher, Tu Fu by name. What you might call a proverb, an aphorism."

"An aphorism?" echoed Oliver. He smiled. "And would you translate it for me?"

Wah Hung Fung regarded him coldly. "My dear Mr. Oliver, you and your friend did not come here for a translation of this thing. You are here on quite some other errand. I am not a fool, even though I came originally from a strange land. Gentlemen, what is your errand with me —your true mission?"

Oliver turned savagely on him. His hand crept down to his coat pocket. The motion was ominous. His voice was something close to a snarl.

"You are quite right, Honorable Wah. We did come here on another errand. The piece of paper constituting the original of this photostat was found this morning underneath the safe of Jech, a curio dealer who was murdered over on East Twenty-second Street in the early hours. It happened that the spot where it was found was well swept yesterday. Hence this has therefore appeared there between yesterday and dawn to-day.

"Likewise," he added, "a woman who has had dealings with Jech—who has threatened him because he had in his safe something which he would not give up—has been in conference with you. That is all."

The Chinese heard him through, not a muscle of his phlegmatic face moving. "I—I—understand that Jech was murdered," he admitted. "I—I have had dealings with Jech myself."

"He was murdered, all right," declared Oliver. "And an attempt was made to open his safe."

"But that attempt was unsuccessful," put in the Chinese quickly.

Oliver nodded. Mattox was wondering what the Oriental's game was. The Chinaman dropped into a chair close by and stared at the photostat with its complicated hieroglyphics. "So, gentlemen, you believe for some reason that Wah Hung Fung had a hand in this crime, and you came here determined to trap him in some way? Indeed, you are quite certain in your mind that Wah has had a hand in this affair. Which one of you, if I may ask, is connected with the police? Or is it both of you?"

"I only," replied Oliver, exposing the badge on the vest, "am duly qualified in the city of Chicago as a private detective. I am also qualified to make arrests, and I go armed to make them wherever they are necessary and any resistance is met."

"I see." The Chinese rose from his chair and paced back and forth several steps. Then he looked at the man who had just spoken to him. "Let us all be seated," he suggested. "This is a time for calm, friendly discussion. Yes, my friends; the news this morning that Jech of East Twenty-second Street had been murdered in an attempted burglary was something of a shock to me. Rest assured of that, please. For you see I myself went to Jech's yesterday morning and warned him to transfer from his show window on the street a certain miniature green jade hand of six fingers and place it safely in his safe; to refuse to sell it until he heard from me. For that jade token had been stolen."

"How did you happen to know that it was stolen?" asked Oliver, from his voice apparently mollified and somewhat dazed. "And how did you know Jech had it for sale? Likewise, what connection has this Sadie Hippolyte with all this?"

"This Hippolyte woman," declared Wah, "I know little or nothing of. She came to me the other day to help her find a Chinese, Li Ling Lee, who had lived at her rooming house in Cleveland. It seems that this Li Ling Lee, before departing for Chicago, had stolen from one, Wong Kwei, a Chinese living in that same house, a tiny green jade hand which this woman claimed she wished for a keepsake. But I knew instinctively that she was lying."

"Just what sort of a thing is it?" asked Oliver. "A green jade—"

"A tiny, inconsequential bit of carving," the Chinese interrupted, "worth but a few dollars intrinsically; historically, perhaps more. A hand of six fingers with a gold ring on the index finger, which was in the pointing position. That was her description of it. By methods known only to the Chinese section I was able easily to discover Li Ling Lee as a cook in a chop-suey restaurant run by one, Quien Quong, here in Chinatown.

"Li Ling Lee came when summoned," he went on calmly. "I interviewed him in my library next morning—that room there"—Wah pointed to a door—"and held him while I questioned the woman more rigorously. Then we admitted him in front of her. He claimed that the Chicago police had arrested him Tuesday night just gone, but that before he had been arrested he had taken fright and had tossed the green jade hand into a pan of chop-suey he had just made. He—"

"But why should they arrest him?" Oliver broke in. "This thing is all a tangle to me."

"Here, too," echoed Mattox, speaking for the first time.

"You will perceive in a minute," explained the elderly Chinese. "To continue, Li Ling Lee was released as soon as the police discovered that he had a false or artificial leg. It was plain therefore that—"

"That the police," interrupted Oliver, "happened to know that whoever they were looking for had two good legs,

and that this Li Ling Lee's false one made an identification of some sort for him. But I still don't get matters. What were the police doing in this thing anyway?"

"Your American police often work on cases for long times secretly but persistently," declared Wah Hung Fung. "And for that precise reason I dared not, after I had found the green jade hand in the particular curio shop where it had been sold, buy it myself, for Jech somehow knew me. In fact East Twenty-second Street is not such a great distance from this section, and he had probably made a practice of buying curios here, in which case I must have been pointed out to him at various times.

"Indeed," he continued, "I saw that Wah Hung Fung must remain out of such matters; that Wah Hung Fung must not enter into that which the police were already handling. All I could do was to warn Jech firmly to take this trinket out of his window and not to sell it. I knew, gentlemen, that this woman Sadie Hippolyte must eventually stumble upon its location. And I sorely needed time to think—to plan." He stopped.

"Go on," pressed Oliver. "I don't at all see your reasoning that the police were working upon anything connected with the green jade hand when they merely took this fellow Li Ling Lee up. Perhaps it was just a tong murder or something."

Wah Hung Fung shook his head sadly. "No; I had reason to know otherwise. You probably are not aware of it, gentlemen, but in Peiping it is an old custom—has been for centuries, from long before the Meng dynasty, in fact—to keep a record of the line of oldest male descendancy of every man who distinguished himself in arts, sciences, or crafts. This custom of imperial recording was brought forcibly to my mind after I had thought about this six-fingered jade hand, after I had cudgeled my brain and had recalled having read in one of my many volumes on Chi-

nese art and Chinese biography something concerning the genesis of a like bit of carving, and after I had made a search in my library.

"That search was successful," the Oriental continued, "even though guided only by my instinct and by those impressions which I have read and stored in my brain cells for years. I found the anecdote at last. It told of Kang-Tse, an artistic jade worker, brother of Teng-Tse and Ko-Tse, both artists and artisans also, in the reign of Meng Hoang-Ti, who carved a six-fingered hand of jade and presented it to the beautiful O Lia Meng, who refused it and sent it back to him. For which he straightway killed himself!" He stopped. "Is everything quite clear thus far, gentlemen?"

"About as clear as mud," snorted Oliver. "I don't see what this old Chinese history has to do with a safe cracking job on East Twenty-second Street. It seems to me as though—"

Wah Hung Fung raised his hand. "No; I know you don't see the steps yet. But you will. All right. I learned the old story of Kang-Tse and his unfortunate love affair, and perceiving that he died childless knew that in all probability one of his two brothers got the sacred memento. We Chinese, gentlemen, have a most deep regard for things of the heart, and in all likelihood such a thing would be handed down from father to eldest son as a memory of their illustrious ancestor, Kang-Tse. Acting on this theory, I cabled the police department of Peiping which, thanks to the stable condition at last of China, is functioning again, and asked them to consult the registrar in the palace and ascertain the present living descendants of Teng-Tse and Ko-Tse, the brothers. Their reply informed me that the Teng-Tse branch had died out with Teng-Tse's son, but that Ko-Tse was represented to-day by one Foy Yuh Yuan, for thirty years Chinese consul to San Francisco,

and who had one American-born son living here, Charley Foy, of San Francisco. Then, gentlemen, for the first time I knew to what that hand was a clew."

"And to what was it a clew?" inquired Oliver. "Also, who is Charley Foy?"

"I can only infer, Mr. Oliver," said Wah, "that you do not peruse carefully your own American newspapers. Or perhaps the affair was more prominent in the Chinese papers of this country." He paused. "Charley Foy was the cashier of the Chino-American Bank of San Francisco. He skipped from that city with a valise containing two hundred thousand dollars in bank bills and unregistered American Liberty Bonds. Now do you get it all?"

"I get it all right," replied Oliver quietly. "This hand, then, this green jade hand, must have come down the Ko-Tse line to Foy Yuh Yuan, who turned it over to his son, Charles Foy. And likewise the Chinese Wong Kwei, who lived at Sadie Hippolyte's rooming house in Cleveland and from whom Li Ling Lee stole it, must have been Charley Foy incognito. And I would wager that Li Ling never even suspected the illustrious—or shall I say notorious?—countryman with whom he had become acquainted.

"Indeed," he went on, "I recall just a trifle regarding that Charley Foy embezzlement. The thing I remember in particular was the painstaking and clever method the man used in order to get a week's start before the thing should be discovered. Put a delirious countryman who resembled him in his bed at his rooms, and it was four or five days before the hospital authorities informed the bank that their patient claimed a different name than that of Charles Foy. In fact, as a Chinese, with Chinese features, he could not make his get-away without a good four or five days' start."

Oliver paused. "So you dared not buy the hand yourself, Mr. Wah," he added, "for you realized that the American police were hovering thickly around the case?"

"Precisely," admitted Wah. "It is plain that in some

way it was reported, perhaps by some Cleveland patrolman, that two Chinese were living in the Hippolyte rooming house in Cleveland, and a little investigation revealed the fact that one had died and one had come on to Chicago. They got on Li Ling Lee's trail, thinking that it was quite possible that he was the fugitive Charley Foy, still incognito. But the police here in Chicago found that he had an artificial leg and pushed him out of the station. Just how much more they knew, I dared not guess at the time."

"And what do you think Sadie Hippolyte's scheme is?" asked Mattox at this juncture. Matters were shaping up quite a bit differently from what they had appeared a short while before.

"Simply this," replied Wah. "In some way that green jade hand is the necessary clew to the location of that two hundred thousand dollars that Charley Foy stole. He must have become enamored of this Hippolyte woman before he died, and he gave her the secret of how to use the jade hand to recover the stolen loot. But it's plain that the secret of the whereabouts of the loot isn't sufficient without the trinket to help it out, for the woman is nearly frantic to secure it. The hand was gone after this Foy died in her place, and she came on to Chicago on the theory—or the hope—that Li Ling Lee had stolen it while his countryman lay sick unto death. As for me, I have been playing my quiet game—for my own countrymen only. Ten thousand of them—poor laundry keepers, restaurant waiters, house boys, and what not—lost their savings when that Chino-American Bank closed its doors on Market Street in San Francisco. My children must have their money back; I must work for them and work hard.

"This woman came back to me yesterday morning," he continued, "having located that curio store through a want ad in the papers; she admitted in her heated argument that she had found the very customer who carried off the hand from Quien Quong's chop-suey restaurant, and she ac-

cused me of having, what she termed, double-crossed her. She tried to compel me to go back with her to the store and declare to Jech that the thing was not stolen, so that she could purchase it, but of course I refused.

"I had my servant Chang follow her cab after she left here," the Chinaman went on, "and again she returned to Jech's store, evidently with some new offer. That her offer failed is proved by the fact that she came again today, a short while ago, with a proposition that if I should go to the police and declare that a piece of green jade stolen from me is inside of Jech's unopened safe, she would give to me a bracelet bearing a beautiful diamond, a sapphire, and a ruby. She is frantic, and still does not guess that I know her secret—or part of it. She—"

"Just a minute!" interrupted Mattox, leaning forward interestedly. "You say she offered a bracelet bearing a beautiful diamond, a sapphire, and a ruby? Was it in the form of a golden snake with its tail in its mouth?"

Wah Hung Fung nodded, confused. "How—" he began.

Mattox, however, turned triumphantly to Oliver. "That identical bracelet," he declared, "was the chief bauble that was stolen in the Hempstead robbery on the South Shore for which poor Luke got five years, subject to time off for good behavior. If there's any doubt that the Hippolyte woman rejoined Slim Jim Landers afterward, or that Landers really pulled that Hempstead burglary, there's the absolute proof. It all works together like clockwork. It—" He turned to Wah Hung Fung. "But pray go on, Mr. Wah."

Wah Hung Fung opened his mouth to speak, but Oliver spoke first. "Well, Dirk," he said, "the main thing to consider is that your case isn't quite so blue as you thought it was. There was more than one thing in that safe of Jech's that was worth stealing to some one."

Mattox nodded his head. "Yes, Double-O; but did the woman do the job after all? Would she have had the cour-

age to stay here in Chicago and pester the life out of Mr. Wah here? Of course Mr. Wah didn't do the job. Hence it looks as though—"

"Who else might have been after that green jade hand?" Oliver asked quickly of the Chinese dignitary. "Who else could have profited by the hand if that safe had been opened up before Jech was murdered last night?"

The answer of the gorgeously robed Celestial was a little surprising. "No one would have profited," he declared with a smile, "for the green jade hand wasn't in the safe at all."

"Not in the safe at all!" echoed Oliver faintly.

"Exactly," admitted Wah. "Yesterday morning, I foolishly allowed that Li Ling Lee, crooked thief of a more crooked ancestry, to remain in my library while I questioned the Hippolyte woman. I should have known better. The man would steal the halo from his most illustrious ancestor, if he had one. He heard enough, evidently, while he was hidden in the library to know that that jade hand was badly wanted, and I even have a half idea now that he heard the police in the station mention Charley Foy's name when they dismissed him. If so, he must have suspected the strange net into which he was becoming enmeshed.

"At any rate," the Oriental went on, "some kind inspiration caused me, after leaving him alone in my library, to have my servant Chang follow him after he left here. Sure enough, late that afternoon, he crept covertly to Jech's curio store. And that night I discovered that my old volume of the 'Sayings of Tu Fu,' worth perhaps a thousand dollars in your money, and worth still more to an old philosopher like myself, the old volume in which the pages are almost falling from their bindings, was missing. That crooked Li Ling Lee, you see, had stolen it while he waited.

"He knew nothing of its value," continued Wah, "for he is what you in your tongue would call an ignorant coolie.

Under his coat he carried it over to East Twenty-second Street where he had undoubtedly at some previous time seen Jech's curio windows. He offered it to Jech for a paltry twenty dollars, and Jech, a connoisseur on antiques, recognizing its monetary value from its various points—if not from Li Ling Lee's translation of the title—availed himself quickly of the opportunity of buying a genuine old Chinese book and asking no questions.

"Suspecting that it was stolen," the Chinaman went on, "Jech locked it in his safe rather than keep it on exhibition; but in doing so he questioned Li Ling as to a peculiar little object he possessed—a six-fingered green jade hand! Did Li Ling Lee know anything of the value—of the significance of the thing? Oh, yes; Li Ling knew that a six-fingered hand of jade brought luck—good luck to its owner. His own heart must have jumped with joy, for here was the thing he had tossed into the chop-suey; the thing which perhaps could be sold to the Hippolyte woman for another twenty or twenty-five dollars.

"All this negotiation, gentlemen," Wah went on, "took place back of the partition in Jech's store, according to Chang who was outside the street door. This alone proves that Li Ling Lee was conducting his little sale with the greatest of caution. At any rate, when Li Ling Lee saw the green jade hand, he refused to sell the old book unless that trinket was what you Americans call 'thrown in.' And Jech, recognizing from the texture, the brush marks, the binding, that this was a splendid and genuine Chinese antique, over a thousand years old, dared not lose the purchase of it for twenty dollars on account of the insignificant jade hand. He obviously decided to ignore my warning, to ignore the attempts of the woman, to do anything rather than let this Chinese seller get out of there with the antique. So he paid Li Ling Lee the twenty dollars and the green jade hand.

"How do I know all this?" Wah Hung Fung continued.

"First, the loose page you found underneath the safe proves that my 'Sayings of Tu Fu' found its way into Jech's shop and has been handled and inspected, perhaps more than once since, in that rear office. And secondly because we took Li Ling Lee up—secretly and swiftly, late last night—and brought him here, where down in the basement we gave him one hundred blows of a stout bamboo cane on his bare back, forced his story from him, and found the green jade hand upon his person."

Wah Hung Fung stepped to a teakwood case built in the wall and began to unlock it. "You have the whole story now, gentlemen. And I surmise that there is nothing to do but to send for the Hippolyte woman—better, to decoy here here—and for the three of us to force the facts out of her as to this mysterious green jade hand and Charley Foy's stolen two hundred thousand dollars. What do you both suggest?"

CHAPTER XXII

A LITTLE PLAN FOR REVENUE

CHINATOWN was the site of a most interesting discussion, to be sure, this discussion that was being held in the home of Wah Hung Fung; but another discussion amid less elaborate surroundings was taking place at the same time in the special room at the 22nd Street, 35th District, police station which held the plain-clothes men's desks. The latter discussion was quite animated, and it was caused by a multigraphed typewritten copy of a notice appended to the big bulletin board at one end of the room, and signed in ink. Around it clustered a number of detectives of varying ages, physiognomies and thicknesses of neck. The notice causing the buzz of conversation ran as follows:

TO ALL CHIEFS, DETECTIVE SERGEANTS, PLAIN-CLOTHES MEN, PATROLMEN AND PEOPLE OTHERWISE ENGAGED IN THE DETECTION OF CRIME AND THE APPREHENSION OF CRIMINALS:

It being the belief and conviction of the undersigned parties and those who acted with them on the following offer, that crime is most quickly and expeditiously untangled and criminals apprehended during the first 24 hours after a crime has been committed, this hastily constructed but authoritative offer with the corresponding explanation is hereby sent out in multiplicate to all police stations of the city of Chicago, County of Cook:

Be it known that Casimer Jech, proprietor of a curio store just east of 22nd and State Streets, Chicago, found shot to death this morning as described in all Chicago morning paper reports, was a member of the Bohemian Society of Chicago, an old established social and fraternal institution. Be it furthermore known that it is highly advisable to the undersigned that the *SEX* of said Jech's assailant be determined for the following reason: Said Casimer Jech's life had been at one time insured to the extent of $30,000 in favor of a one-time daughter, long since dead, but at the death of said daughter, the policy being paid-up and non-

surrenderable for cash, the insurance was transferred, the Bohemian Society of Chicago being made the beneficiary. It is surmised that the said Jech, in transferring this insurance, was apparently suspicious of a possible attempt upon his life by some too enthusiastic or later-to-be-demented member of this old established society, for the signed transfer paper, of which the original is on file in the Boston Life and the copy thereof with the secretary of the Bohemian Society of Chicago, contains the original phraseology made by Jech in 1904, and specifically states: "Should insured at any time come to his death through a firearm held by any man, or a pointed or blunt weapon wielded by any man, or poison administered by any man, or from injury administered by any man and resulting in death, said insurance money instead of reverting to said Bohemian Society shall revert to the Archaeological Museum of Evanston, Illinois."

The undersigned, on perusal of morning papers announcing the death and mode of death of its valued member, have consulted a nationally prominent firm of attorneys on wills and bequests which has demonstrated, through past rulings made in analogous situations by the highest courts in America, that the law interprets literally all documents in which by the testator's carelessness or that of his lawyers the particular word "man" has been used to cover the generic meaning intended. This being the legal status, if it develops or is proven that the hand that held the revolver which killed Jech was that of a woman, the Bohemian Society of Chicago can proceed to collect the insurance money which, by the terms of Jech's statement, is now forfeited to it.

The undersigned, furthermore, from recent newspaper items, and from a talk with various police officials, learn that strong suspicion exists as to a possible commission of this crime by two women cracksmen, negresses, known as Sally and Opey Harris, erroneously reported arrested three nights ago.

The undersigned therefore have seen fit to offer the sum of $1,000 for evidence of any nature by which will inure to the benefit of the Bohemian Society the Jech insurance policy. This signed notice and offer is consequently given to all police stations in the city of Chicago, County of Cook.

Signed.

A. Langwehr, *President and Chairman of The Board of Directors of the Chicago Bohemian Society.*
D. Kosweh, *Vice Pres.*
Anton Lang, *Sec.*
Rosmer Joh, *Treas.*
A. Kolmar, *Bus. Mgr.*

One of the men, a big black cigar hanging from the cor-

ner of his mouth, turned away from the bulletin board with an avaricious look on his hardened face.

"Doesn't look bad, eh, Skeene?" he said. "Quick work on the part of this here Hunky Club, eh?"

"I'll say so," said Skeene, a bullnecked fellow with hat tilted back on his head. "But I'm going to warrant that they'll not land these slippery female coons. It's in my bones. Too many holes to hide in down in that damn Black Belt. I felt the other day when I heard you pinched 'em in that West 47th Street house that it was a flivver and that you had only a couple of harmless strong arm pickpockets from the Sunset Black-and-Tan." He turned to the board and stared. "I'd like to have my drag out o' that thousand, though, Niblo."

A tall sunburned fellow with a cruel, leering expression on his face and huge ham-like knuckled hands spoke up. "Goes to show," he commented, "no matter how a guy phrases his words there's always a loophole left. It's easy to see that this gink was suspicious that one of these brothers of his might bump him off some fine night for the benefit of the society, and that he took pains to let it be known that there would be ab-so-lutely nothing doing in that case. But he overlooked the beautiful complications that a couple of lady cracksmen could make years afterwards, by his use of those words 'held in the hands of a *man*.' Well, it looks as though the one group that he'd want to have his insurance dough go to won't get a smell of it, and it'll go to this here dried up museum out in Evanston what was probably the only thing he could think of." The speaker paused. "That is, unless it *was* the Harris sisters that pulled the job and we pin it on 'em."

"But I'm not so certain thot th' Harris sisters pulled that stunt, de Koch," said a young plain-clothes man with a stolid Irish face, puckering up his beetled brows and looking as though he'd like to have the real criminal alone in a room for just two hours. "It's a mon's job all the way tru."

"Man's job hell, O'Brien," said another who thus far had remained silent. "These dames are the kinda women that are just as good as men on a man's job. Learned their crib-crackin' trade from the Memphis Smoke, one of the best nigger safecrackers the South ever knew. And they're nervy to boot. Been all over—seen life from the hardboiled circus angle. Got the good judgment and the quick eye that trapeze queens get—too bad they couldn't run straight when they once got aboard with as good a show outfit as Beifield and Levy. Don't you kid yourself, O'Brien, that any man's job is too man-like for this pair of ebony kiddos."

There was a lull. Then detective number two with his hat tilted back spoke up.

"Hanrahan's right. And I give this Hunky Society credit for quick work. And we're all just a little keener to land these two black dames than we were before." He turned to the rest. "I suppose it's understood, you fellows—Niblo, Hanrahan, O'Brien and you too, de Koch—that it's to be a split? I talked to O'Toole. It's to go eight ways. We're to work on this thing independently of the detective bureau downtown. Man that lands the evidence makes the official pinch if there's to be one. He collects the reward. He keeps four hundred. O'Toole drags down two hundred, and the rest o' the boys seventy-five seeds apiece." A lone patrolman in uniform stuck his head in the door as though looking for something. Skeene closed his lips. The policeman's head withdrew. Skeene spoke. "Come closer, all of you."

They all drew near in a knot. He spoke very low this time.

"I'm leary as to whether we're going to make the pinch or not. And I've talked this thing over carefully with O'Toole. O'Toole's hard at work on one or two leads of his own, but he says for me to get one of you down to Evanston at once, and see the museum directors. If it's to this Hunky club's benefit to prove that a woman's hand held that weapon, it's equally as vital to this mausoleum of chipped arrow heads to prove that a man's hand held

the gun. O'Toole wants the thing absolutely cinched for this station. Says get a paper immediately signed by the museum directors offering $1,000 or more for proof that a lone he-cracksman pulled that stunt, and then we'll have another thousand laid against the board in another direction." He paused.

"Now pay close attention. For the benefit of some of you infants here, I'm going to let you inside a secret about downtown headquarters. Some of you know it; the rest of you might as well. The policy of Police Commissioner Mike Haggerty and Chief of Detectives Jack Halloran is to possess no fingerprint records on a murder unless a suspect's prints tally with the ones in the possession of Creel, the f. p. custodian. In other words, if the department—or any arm of it, like this station here—can build a good case against any suspect, the prints'll never be produced for the benefit of the accused's lawyers. Either they'll be conveniently lost as they were in the Hayley conviction and the Bribbens conviction, or else Creel, who as I told you is sole custodian of all f. p. records, will be sent out of town during any trial where the department don't want to weaken a good case. Now that means clear sailing for this outfit, and nothing to worry about. Now let's see what chance we got to get the man—or women—who *did* do that job and whose fingerprints *will* tally with those on the tools, or else somebody who a jury'll convict on general principles." He paused, watching the circle of attentive but hard calloused faces.

"Balby is watching a dope peddler who has sold coke to the Harris sisters before. Personally, I'm not certain whether it's going to result in anything. But if it did, it would mean a pinch inside of twenty-four hours, and a pinch for this station, considering that Balby is the only one in on the know about this dope peddler. There's this to be watched out for: the Harris sisters may have an unshakeable alibi. That apparently means the end of the thou-

sand bucks as far as we're concerned. The rest of these birds locked up downstairs and at headquarters have unshakeable alibis too. But Luke McCracken got out of Joliet the other day, and he headed for Chicago. He called up Harry Varney, who's been stooling out from Maxwell Street station, and dropped the info he was out and going to head straight. Varney's the best stool the Maxwell Street station ever had. But he got sore on 'em the other day on account of getting beaten up by some bootlegger they asked him to double-cross, and he's come over to work personally for O'Toole; he's stooling in this 22nd Street District right now. He found out from McCracken that he was temporarily located in a room at the Star Hotel on Halsted Street. And McCracken hasn't shown up yet at the Star. With double inside information like that, we stand to split that thousand either way—but we got to have the counter reward offered before we close in on McCracken. I'd say we've got him where we want him. Ex-safecracker—out of his room all night—who knows what other kind of a tangle he's in with this Jech affair?—but we'll third-degree him as he's never been third-degreed before, and with what we pin on him he'll go to the chair where his kind belongs. And for the present we're holding the net tightly over our other birds—all of 'em."

He scanned the other faces and finally settled on de Koch. "De Koch, you're the smooth con artist. It's you to Evanston and the arrowhead mausoleum. And don't come back without a signed offer of $1,000—or higher."

The smooth talking de Koch buttoned up his coat. There was a lull. Finally Hanrahan spoke.

"How come Simple wasn't in on the show this morning? Hawkshaw must have been sick if he failed to sit in on a 4-11 call like Hennesy rang in." He laughed, a sneering, sickly laugh. "I'm thinking we need Hawkshaw on this nice little problem of sex determination."

"I'll say we do," echoed Niblo, chewing on his cigar.

Suddenly the silence was rent by Skeene clapping his hand down upon his knee. "Boys," he guffawed, "I've got a stunt."

They all turned and surveyed him puzzledly. De Koch paused in the act of leaving the room to catch the Evanston electric.

"Have you fellows," asked Skeene, "thought about the plain-clothes men's ball at Firemen's Hall next week?"

"I've done more than that," put in Niblo, "seeing that I'm treasurer. And there's going to be a shortage for fair. I told you we should have charged more for the tickets. The thing's a liability instead of an asset to us. The raise in the rent of the hall was the final blow."

"Yes," said Skeene, an enthusiastic light gleaming in his hard eyes, "but instead of the plain-clothes men's association coughing up the three hundred or so shortage, I've got a scheme to break even and pull a profit. And Simple—Simple will provide the funds."

They all stared. One could see reflected in their faces the loyal hope that their society, which ranked far above the patrolmen's association, would not suffer a loss from its capital.

"Here's the dope," said the speaker quickly. "Pretty near every newspaper guy in Chicago, at some time or other when he gets transferred over to this station to cover police, wants to see this nut Simple, particularly when the boob investigates a crime with that lay-out of his. He's a scream, and they've all heard of him. Likewise there's a regular procession of curiosity vamps that have been tackling Johnny Hines at the door of Jech's place for permission to step in and rubber. A pretty good number have applied here, as well." He paused. "And here's my big idea. We'll rip out that flimsy partition that separates Jech's office from his store, and stretch a rope across. And we'll stage a show there to-night. Jech hadn't a relative within a thousand miles that can butt into the affair. We'll charge one buck admission and we'll—"

"But hell," interposed de Koch," even the curiosity bugs—one buck is a pretty stiff price to get in to see the place. I don't—"

"Wait," said Skeene gruffly. "We'll print hurried tickets, and spread some of 'em out by Charlevoix and Summers and Cassino, before they go back to the *American*, the *Journal*, and the *News* offices to-night. For newspaper men the show will be free. But those same newspaper guys have dozens of friends—the kind that pester 'em for a box seat on any big inside stuff. They can call up these birds and tell 'em that for one round buck, at nine bells sharp, or—say nine-thirty?—they can see the show. We'll slip Hines, now stationed at the curio store, a pack of tickets. To everybody that asks to step in he can tell 'em the big rubberneck show starts at nine-thirty to-night, toll one dollar, and sell 'em a ticket. Chief O'Toole's a good fellow. He'll give a crackerjack talk, explaining yegg methods in general and police methods in handling a crime like this. We can sell 400 tickets easy by high-pressure methods. We can jam the holders in there like sardines, and nobody to put up a kick. We'll make 'em stand shoulder to shoulder, and—"

"But Oi tell you, Skeene," broke in O'Brien, "no wan will pay thot amount just to rubber."

"Wait," said the speaker impressively, "I'm not done. Here's the stunt. I beat it across the street and get some tickets printed, and the tickets will describe the big attraction of the show. In other words, boys, we'll bull Simple by telling him the mayor called him in on the case, and have him give one of his screaming exhibitions of crime solving, with that long false beard of his, that sunglass tied to a piece of broomhandle, that old flashlight with a stub of candle stuck in the nozzle, and that cap pistol of his. He's the original burlesque on Sherlock Holmes the way he struts around and marks down things on his piece of slate, and all that other nut stuff he pulls."

"And the big green sun-goggles and the cotton mus-

tache he uses to disguise himself as an old man," put in Hanrahan.

Skeene waited triumphantly. "What do you all think of it?"

Responses were numerous and affirmative. "That last modification'll put the show over," declared Niblo, now convinced. "You can make it stronger by having the tickets read 'Hawkshaw, formerly of the Lincoln School for the Feeble-Minded' or something like that." He turned to the rest. "Am I right?"

There were enthusiastic nods. The sheer novelty of the plan was beginning to dawn on them.

"Then you're the goat, Skeene," said Niblo, "for you proposed it. You get the tickets, and place 'em with all the newspaper boys in town, and with Hines at the door." His muscled paunch shook as he thought about the matter. "Lord, they'll hoot Simple out o' the place."

Chief O'Toole appeared in the doorway. His forehead was creased with fine lines denoting official police thought of an intense nature.

"Come in, Niblo, O'Brien and Hanrahan. Want to talk to you about this reward and the chances of our outfit getting the man—or woman. I've worked out some startling theories on this case." All the men buttoned up their coats and stood at attention. All except de Koch, however, who had evidently already discussed matters with his superior.

As for Skeene, the kingpin of the plain-clothes men, he straightened out his clothes, and left the detectives' room, smiling. He crossed the street quickly, and went into a tiny printshop across the way, where an ink-smeared printer stood by an idle press, gazing with a bored look out onto the street. Skeene spoke a few words, and then, the printer looking down at his elbow, outlined on a square of scratch paper a number of bold pencilled words.

Immediately the printshop proprietor was throwing type

from various fonts into a brass hand form. Ten minutes later he had run a smeary proof, made a correction or two, and had locked it into the press; whereupon he began running off a number of square pieces of red cardboard. Passing each one over a patented gas flame contrivance as he withdrew it from the press, he ran off 400 of the tickets in quick succession. Skeene smiled as he shuffled them together and snapped a rubber band around the packet. And he smiled even more as he crossed the street again, gazing proudly at the top ticket which read:

EXHIBITION EXTRAORDINARY!!

To Members of the Press, Their Friends, and Others Interested in Crime.

ADMISSION ONE DOLLAR.

SIMON GRUNDT,

Formerly of the Lincoln School for the Feeble Minded, Known to the 22nd Street Police Station as

SIMPLE SIMON

and to the Great Detective World as

HAWKSHAW THE SECOND

Will Give a Marvelous Demonstration of his Methods in Crime Solution, Explaining His Various Modes of Disguise, Deduction, and Examination for the Clues, in the Attempt to Determine Both the Sex and the Identity of the Criminal Who Shot

Casimer Jech of East 22nd Street.

Show Starts Promptly at Nine-thirty P. M., at the Dead Man's Store, 14 East 22nd Street. Admission Limited to 250.
All Profits to the Plainclothesmen's Association Fund.

A SCREAM! DON'T MISS IT!

CHAPTER XXIII

MR. HAWKSHAW GOES A-HAWKSHAWING

SIMON GRUNDT, known more simply as "Simple," was experiencing a feeling which, in a person of normal keenness of intellect and observation, would be known —to utilize a pun!—as a dis-gruntled feeling. Early that morning, with the despatching of all the week's accumulated "30 day" donees to the "Bridewell," he had been routed out from his rickety cot down in the cell room corridor and put to scrubbing out all the newly vacated cells and whitewashing the walls. At first he had experienced a sudden feeling of pride that he had been delegated to such important work as wielding a brush instead of a mop in these cheerless cubby holes, but he had soon wearied of his job, especially as he hád dimly sensed somehow in his distorted brain, when glimpsing Chief O'Toole and one of the "dicks" snickering behind their hands, that he was being made of what is technically known as a "goat."

Yet let it be known, however, that in Simple's simple brain there was no smoldering feeling of enmity; only the faintest shadow of a comprehension that he was somehow being taken advantage of. This feeling never reached greater proportion than that of an adumbration—a shadow, for Simple knew and realized that he was being treated most magnificently. Did he not get a nice wooden-and-wire cot to sleep on down there—one that he could call all his own? And did he not get a tin plate full of nice bones and scraps three times a day from the patrolmen's co-operative mess kitchen? And did he not, on Sundays, by dint of much scraping of the two freezers, manage to secure a saucerful of that toothsome delicacy known as ice-cream? And not long ago, in fact, one of the detectives had

brought him down a pair of worn brown corduroy pants, badly darned in the seat, and with trouser legs frayed; and now, through this overwhelming exhibition of generosity he possessed two pairs, the other one in his locker. And a prince of a detective likewise had contributed to his equipment for the detection of crime the leather case of a cast-off pocket flashlight and had shown him how, by sticking a tiny stub of a candle in the reflector, and igniting it, it provided a light wholly as efficacious and direct as those carried by the regular detectives.

In exchange for all these kindnesses and evidences of largesse, all he had to do was to scrub, and wash windows, and run errands, and paint, and whitewash, carry trays, buy cigars for the boys, help the cook peel potatoes, wait on the patrolmen's co-operative mess table, empty cuspidors, dust railings, wash woodwork, polish brass, scrub the automobile patrol, and mop countless square feet of cement floor. That the payroll carried the fictitious names of two janitors or porters for the 22nd Street station, neither of whom were necessary because of Simple's industry, was not known to him, nor would such abstruse things have been even comprehensible to him. Nor did he know that these two paychecks of $20 each were duly cashed every week, and that Chief O'Toole had bought his wife a new fur coat for the coming winter and was contemplating a larger and more expensive car.

One thing puzzled Simple however. The men were always laughing at something. So long now he had tried to discover what was so funny and odd around that place, so that he too might laugh; but the feature always seemed to elude his search, and he had almost given it up. Strange, too, it was, for the funny thing always seemed to take place when he was with the great men upstairs.

Oh well, what difference did it make? How much better it was here than in that horrible school where all the closely mown green grass was, and the flowers, and the profound

quiet, and nothing ever happened, and the attendants in their white suits were always saying "Don't do this" and "Don't do that." And all those silly creatures around him! Laughing and gesticulating and sitting with their thumbs in their mouths. They were like babies. He was no baby. Never had he put his thumb in his mouth. And that was why he had simply walked away from that unpleasant spot. It was a place for baby-men, and he, who never sucked his thumb, had no business being there with those who did.

It was his ambition to be like those men upstairs. Those men, who, whenever something was done that was not right —something stolen or somebody killed—always got to work. They were what was known as detectives. Simon remembered the big boy who used to read aloud the gaudy novels to the other boys in the Widder Pecksmith's haymow at Elmo Junction, Illinois, long before he was sent to the school for the baby-men. He didn't quite understand everything read from those colored books, for people and things were so frightfully jumbled up. But always near the end of the story, the great character in the book called Hawkshaw pulled off his beard and pointing to one of the people the big boy was reading about, said: "I am Hawkshaw the detective, and you are the man that stole the jewels!" or "You are the man that killed the Duke de Montmorency!"

And that was who he, Simple, was going to be. He was on the road to realizing his ambition here, among these friendly men who fed him and allowed him to do a mere seven or eight hours work per day in exchange. He knew down in his heart that some day he was going to be known among them all as Hawkshaw. Already he had collected together a number of tools, such as were used by men such as they. And already he had learned by watching them that, after a crime was committed—and he himself looked upon a dead bloody body with not so much as an emotion or a

quiver—there were tiny insignificant details known as clues which later brought men handcuffed, cursing and swearing and raging, into the cell room from whence they were later carried away to a place called the county jail to await what was known as Trial. Already he had learned to place upon his face things that were known as disguises, even the astute men upstairs failing utterly to recognize him when he had them on. He was getting along famously.

To-day, however, as he sat on the cell room bench, tired to death after wielding the whitewash brush all morning, he felt vaguely conscious that somehow all was not well. And as he tried hard to analyse this strange depression, he noticed Skeene, the biggest of the big men upstairs—except Chief O'Toole—come down into the cell room and beckon to him. He did not exactly like Skeene, but he rose quickly and ambled obediently over to the plain-clothes man.

"Now listen, Simple," said Skeene gruffly. "You're going to give an exhibition to-night. Get me?"

Simple stared dumbly.

"Here's the point," explained the other. "Down on 22nd Street early this morning a guy named Jech was croaked. Peterman came to kick in his gopher—blow his safe, get me, Simp? Jech come down in the night, and the peterman shot him dead. Got that in your noodle, Simp?"

Simple nodded vehemently. He understood thus far, plainly.

"You didn't get a sit-in," explained Skeene leeringly, "because you were snoring when the wagon call came in last night, and all morning you've been too blamed anxious to whitewash these cells to pay attention to what's going on. Shame on you, Simp!" He grinned at the half-wit. "Now, Simp, we don't know who pulled this job. And we don't know whether it was a man that shot Jech, or a couple of black women that are working this district. But

we gotta find out something. We're stumped. And so the Mayor of Chicago has ordered us to bring you into the case to try and find out some of these things."

"The Mayor!" breathed Simon, awed.

"Yep," continued Skeene, lying artistically. "The Mayor. And to-night there's going to be a big bunch of people in this store. They're all coming to see you work and examine the scene of the crime, Simp. Get ready to do your best, kid, and pull all of them screamingly funny—er—them stunts of yours. I think you're the gink that can piece things together. We fellows upstairs think the job was pulled by these women—but we're balked." He paused. "Got your beards and peepers, and glasses and searchlights and all of your tools?"

"Yizz, yizz, 'e bet I gootim," mumbled the half-wit. He was still quite overawed. At last the world had seen fit to call him in—to ask his opinion.

"Now that's all," pronounced Skeene. "We'll run you down there in a cab to-night." He reached munificently down into his pocket. "And here's a dime, Simp. I'll speak to old Dad, the cell room man, and let you run out and play awhile. Don't forget the big work to-night, though." He turned on his heel and left the room.

Simple felt suddenly weak with glory. He fingered the dime reverently. Tremendous day! Added to this, he had received a dime all his own. It was too much!

He finally overcame his awe sufficiently to seize his old cap and to saunter from the station in the bright afternoon sunlight. He ambled along 22nd Street, his eyes and mind jumping helter-skelter from vivid point to vivid point of the unattractive district. Once he paused in his tracks and stood for a long time on the edge of a tiny grass plot staring at a bird pulling a worm out of a hole in the ground, and he noticed how the bird stretched the worm to many times its length before he finally got it. This was puzzling, and he was lost a long time stretching himself and watch-

ing his shadow on the sidewalk. It was strange. His own body did not alter, yet this shadow elongated and shortened itself by several feet. How could a worm become several times its own length? Was a worm like a shadow?

He gave up the problem with a sigh. Ambling on further, he passed a talkie show, with great gaudy lithographs outside. He stood in front of it and painfully spelled out the words: ADVENTURES OF KEENEYES, THE DETECTIVE." Finally grasping the significance, and seeing over the window a sign which read "Admission 10 cents," he strode up to it and presented his solitary dime.

Inside the dimly lighted theatre he reveled for twenty minutes in a gorgeous film in which a man with a dozen changes of face passed through many exciting situations, finally pulling off his beard and trapping a villainous-looking creature. The film was now so old and ancient that the sound rendition was almost destroyed, but he watched the movements of the actors themselves in utter rapport. When it was completed, he sat through the entire film over again, and then, tired of even this super-attractive entertainment, left and again continued down the street.

Thus it was that he came at last face to face with Hines, standing in his brass-buttoned, bright Khaki uniform in front of a store whose windows were full of funny little figures and books and shiny nick-nacks. It took Simple a minute or two to digest the fact, and then he realized that it must be here that Skeene had spoken of.

Hines snickered when he came up. His salutation betrayed only too plainly that one London cockney was functioning in the police department of the London of the West. "Owdy, Simple. 'Awkshawing, eh?" He stood aside from the door. "Parss h'in, 'Awkshaw."

Simple, chest puffed out, acknowledged the salutation with a nod, and strutted inside the dim interior of the store. He went back to the tiny office, brightly lighted up. Now here, he regretted not having his tools. To be sure, he had

in his hind pocket his wallet of statistical data, but he should at least have his beard strapped on his face, if not his entire paraphernalia. Still, however, there was nobody to gaze upon him, and in view of this even his subnormal brain felt vaguely that the beard would be out of place.

He squatted down on his haunches and studied the safe a long time. He puzzled over the steel plate that protected the lock mechanism and wiggling his head back and forth his queer eyes caught the shining glint where the file had made a trial cut in the upper rivet. To Simon Grundt, famous detective, this seemed to mean nothing, however, but, like a true criminal investigator, he painfully prepared his investigative field by removing from his pocket his "statistical wallet," as the detectives back in the station amusedly called it, and laid out its contents piece by piece on the floor. Bits of burlesque show lithographs torn from billboards, cheap pink and green cardboard tickets announcing home-cooked meals served in scraggly restaurants, old street-car transfers, pictures of bobbed-haired movie actresses found in empty cigarette cartons—nearly everything, in fact, that man, in his peregrination through civilization, jettisons as he peregrinates!

Now with his field prepared, his official duty as an investigator was done, and he could devote himself to sheer pleasure. With which, he arose and walked about the room six or seven times. He studied the walls, stopping in turn to marvel at every picture and ornament. His mind, such as it was, appeared to be trying to formulate a picture which should be somewhat along the lines Skeene had drawn, and it seemed to be halfway succeeding. But the intense effort caused him to wrinkle up his brows.

Hines outside was whistling a tune and thinking of his new baby which had arrived only that morning, when Simple emerged fully ten minutes later.

"Meesher Hinez," he said, his deformed tongue clicking

against the wrong parts of his mouth. "W'en Simple was in baby-men skool?"

"In th' byby-men school?" said the Cockney patrolman, good-naturedly, endeavoring to match one strange dialect with his own equally different one. "W'y—that's w'ere ye come from. Th' Lincoln School f'r the Feeb—well, th'—you know, Simp. Yes, the byby-men school."

"Nu-nu-nu-nunu," cried Simple. "Simple know where Simple come from before Simple detekative. When Simple in baby-men skool?"

"When?" Hines, however, was failing utterly to connect with the wire in Simple's brain.

"Iss twenny-eight ni'teen—iss twenny-ni' ni'teen—iss thirry-ni'teen—iss when?" asked Simple desperately.

"Wot th'—" ejaculated the other bewilderedly. "Thirry—ni'teen?" He shook his head. "Blimey if I gets you, Simp. Thirry—thirty! Oh—sure. You sure knows as 'ow to ball up figgers, Simple. But h'I gets you now. Well, they says as 'ow you was in the baby-men school three years. And this is nineteen thirty-one. You been with the stytion f'r habout four months—since long before me bloomin' countryman, 'Ubert Tipton-Couch, toff as e' was, myde the world's record for flying on June 12 and 13, this year 'o our Lord 1931. So you was in the byby-men school all o' 1930, '29, and most o' 1928."

"Zass w'at I mean, Meesher Hinez." Simple magically produced a piece of bright blue chalk. "Write it—here—on sidewalking," he ordered. "Wri' when Simple in baby-men skool."

Hines, with a sigh, leaned over and wrote out the four digits, 1930, on the pavement.

"Wri' other year Simple in baby-men skool—befor'."

Hines was becoming irritated. He wrote out a round 1929.

"Now wri' ziss year."

Hines wrote it, manifestly angry.

"Now wri' nex' year."

Hines was red-faced. "By the bloody bloomin' nerve o' you, Simple. Do you think I'm runnin' a school meself f'r 'alf-w—that is, is it a 'uman dyte stamp I am for such as ye?"

"Wri' it," screamed the half-wit.

Hines gave a troubled look at this exhibition of emotion, and proceeded to add the round figures 1932 to his mounting column, but standing up, tossed the blue chalk out into the street to avoid further argument. But the half-wit was satisfied, as one who had oriented himself with that bewildering time-space continuum known as life. He nodded his head as sagely as might, perhaps, Albert Einstein's own star pupil, and went back in to resume his painstaking and beclouded examination of the premises.

A quarter of an hour passed. Finally he appeared. He heaved a long sigh. He shuffled down the street, without even a goodbye to Hines.

As he walked he muttered to himself. "Simple in baby-men skool. Simple in baby-men skool. Simple in baby-men skool. But Meesher Skeene say 'oomans kill man. If 'oomans kill man, zen why man's—" He broke off, shaking his head. The great Hawkshaw, instead of tightening the straps that were to bind the Harris sisters in the electric chair was, for some reason, loosening them as a kitten might loosen an emperor's shoestrings.

But fortunate it was for the 22nd Street station. If the powerful straps of the electric chair should loosen from around the limbs and bodies of the Harris sisters, there was still the person of Luke McCracken for them to close tightly upon. The police can't lose!

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SIGHT THAT FROZE

IN the home of Wah Hung Fung, a long silence followed the statement of the elderly Chinese, concerning the feasibility of decoying Sadie Hippolyte to this house in Chinatown, and the forcing from her of what she might know about the green jade hand and Charley Foy's stolen two hundred thousand dollars in negotiable bonds. And during this silence he completed the unlocking of the teak-wood cabinet and brought forth a tiny article which he laid on the table before Mattox and Oliver.

Both of them came forward, curiously scrutinizing it. It was a delicately carved bit of jade, slightly dappled with brown, and the six digits of the miniature hand gave it quite an uncanny effect, as did the tiny thread of gold serving as a ring around its pointing forefinger. After Oliver's close inspection Mattox took it in his own fingers, turning it this way and that, examining every bit of it; but nowhere, not even on the thread of gold, was there a scratch, a number, a sign, a mark, or even a Chinese hieroglyphic. Blankly he laid it down on the table and looked up.

"It's difficult to see how it can be the key to Foy's stolen bills and bonds," he commented, "and yet it certainly must be, according to the way in which the Hippolyte woman is trying to get it. There isn't a mark anywhere on it."

"Exactly," agreed the Chinese quickly. "Which will make it necessary for us to use some strong threats, persuasion, psychology, or physical force to make her talk. And we may be either successful or unsuccessful."

The three men sat in silence for a moment.

At last Oliver spoke. "Then, Honorable Wah," he said, "I suggest that you phone for her to come here at once,

telling her that you wish to talk to her about her recent proposition. She is back at her temporary quarters in this city, for Mattox and I followed her to the Ontario Hotel only a short while ago. And in the meantime we may be making our plans, such as they are."

Wah Hung Fung arose. "You will excuse me, then," he said, "while I go into my little private office and call her." He was gone two or three minutes and then returned, sinking once more luxuriously into his big chair. "She is summoned, and she will come. But what shall we do when she arrives?"

"Suppose you let me do the talking after we get her in here," Oliver said. "That'll unify the military operations in the allies' camp! The thing to do is to show that we have the hand and let her think we know what it's the key to. If that, with a little kindly persuasion, doesn't work, then we proceed to place her under arrest, and ostensibly prepare to give her over to the regular police. Perhaps she'll talk then. She's a hard customer; on the other hand, she deserves all she'll get if she's trying to grab for her own little self the two hundred thousand cash that belongs to a bunch of innocent Orientals in San Francisco. What do you think, Dirk?"

"We can try it, anyway," returned the latter. "Perhaps she'll spill when she knows the jig is up."

"And perhaps she won't," put in Oliver grimly. "Even in such immaterial things as secrets, possession is nine points of the law."

They had discussed the matter only a short while when the faint, almost indistinguishable, sound of a slamming taxicab door came into the big silent room. On top of this came a ring at the bell, and a moment later Chang appeared in the doorway.

"Honorable Wah," he said in English, "as per your instructions I am here to tell you she has come. Missis Hip —Hippol—Hippolyte."

"Show Madam or Miss Hippolyte in," ordered Wah. He motioned to the farther corner of the room with a significant movement of his forefinger.

Mattox and Oliver rose at once and got out of the line of vision from the door. A few seconds later Sadie Hippolyte entered and dropped into a chair with her back to the two younger men.

"Well, old boy," she inquired breezily of Wah Hung Fung, "did you think over my proposition? Does that bracelet look like the real stuff?" She took it off and laid it on the table where the three beautiful, differently colored gems in it flashed from the light coming in through the partly opened swinging Chinese windows. "Must have cost two thousand bucks, old boy, and worth a thousand spot cash most anywhere."

Wah smiled an enigmatic smile. "My servant outside understands English," he said quietly, "so we had better have privacy." He swept over to the door of the room, and Mattox smiled as he saw the Chinese turn the key in the lock and drop it into the pocket of his gorgeous blouse.

No sooner had the Chinese dignitary done this, however, than his voice changed to a tone that was hard and metallic. "Madam Hippolyte—I do not know whether it is Mrs. or Miss—will you please meet Mr. Oliver Oliver and Mr. Dirk Mattox. Mr. Oliver is a detective."

The woman rose from her chair and swung around; her skirts swished; her chest heaved; her eyes flashed fire; her cheeks turned scarlet, blazing red. "Double-crossed again, eh?" she snarled. "Glad to meet you, gentlemen! And what do you think you want with me, if I may make so bold as to ask?"

Oliver crossed the room quickly and pocketed the bracelet which still lay on the table near her. "Won't you be seated, Mrs. Hippolyte?" he said in a conciliating tone. "If you please."

The force of his gentlemanly persuasion seemed to have

a slight effect, for she sank into her own chair, but still watched him cautiously, dangerously, much as a rat trapped by a dog. And in her eyes there still blazed a defiance which boded no good for mild tactics.

Oliver, seeing that she was seated, spoke kindly: "Mrs. Hippolyte—or Miss Hippolyte—I do not happen to know which it is—I'm sorry to tell you that we know that this Wong Kwei who died in your rooming house in Cleveland was no other than Charley Foy, the missing cashier of the Chino-American Bank of San Francisco. And we realize full well that this green jade hand is the key to the location of that two hundred thousand in cash and Liberty Bonds which he stole; which he never had an opportunity to do away with before he died."

He reached down into his pocket and withdrew the jade trinket. "And here is the hand itself. Now, Mrs. Hippolyte, you have played a good game, and as an adversary I congratulate you. This is all a game. We three men, representing the law and not ourselves, win, for we have the hand. Also, this bracelet is the one that was stolen in the Hempstead burglary on the South Shore four years ago. Now, since we have the hand, hadn't you better be a good loser and tell us the story?"

The woman laughed a sneering, harsh laugh. "Thanks for your solicitation," she rasped. "Keep the bracelet—also the hand. I don't want 'em now. They can't touch me just because Slim Jim Landers gave me the bracelet before he died in Detroit. And if you think you can have a little talkfest with me, go ahead. Talk on. You'll have to do it all yourself."

Oliver's face changed. It grew suddenly hard, and under his genial eyes came little taut lines. "Gentlemen," he said, "you all heard this woman announce the source of this bracelet. It won't send her over the road where she belongs, but it will absolve the poor devil that served three years and nine months for the crime."

He turned to her. "We shall now call the patrol wagon, take you over to the nearest detective headquarters, and you're going to get what the worst cracksman in the town would get if he tried to keep a mum mouth on anything the police wanted. I don't believe in the third degree—but there's cases like this where it's the only thing. Now, Mrs. Hippolyte," he went on, "hadn't you better come across? Do you want credentials from me to show that I'm with the police, not for myself?" He tapped on his vest pocket. "I've got them here, if you think you need them."

"Don't need 'em," she snapped. "Don't even want to see 'em. Why, you poor fools, I've been mixed up with the bulls before! They tried to third-degree me in Detroit after Slim Jim Landers was shot, and they only succeeded in beating me up." Her voice rose to a shrill cry. "They got nothing—nothing, I tell you! They got nothing out of me! Go on, call your bulls. I know nothing at all. I know—I know——"

Her voice suddenly quavered. It grew faint. The bright crimson in her cheeks faded, and a look of such intense terror came into her eyes, that Mattox, Oliver, and Wah all turned bewilderedly in the direction in which she was staring fascinatedly, each man almost expecting to see some terrible spectre that suddenly had risen from the floor and was flapping its gaunt arms.

There at the windows—the big swinging windows of illuminated colored glass, containing Chinese dragons and Celestial princesses, the windows which swung half ajar—was a man's face peering in with the most horrible look of vengeance that any of the three ever before had seen. The face bore a several days' growth of beard; its owner wore a dirty mud-stained cap, his collar was dirty and crumpled, his eyes were bloodshot and heavy with loss of sleep.

A tense silence filled the room at the appearance of the head. The woman stood swaying, gasping in terror.

CHAPTER XXV

AN EXPERIMENT WITH A CHINESE BOWL

IT was Mattox who was the first to speak. "Luke," he called aloud, dazedly. "Luke—what are you doing here, man?"

With a shove the windows were sent violently swinging inward, revealing a wooden fence outside which showed plainly how the man of the bristly face and the muddy cap had gained access to the rear part of the house and in turn to the scene going on in the big room. One leg of the eavesdropper was on the fence, one on the window sill; and back of him only the blank wall of a frame house.

With a leap the ex-cracksman sprang into the room, and gritting his teeth in a rage, his bloodshot eyes holding the look of a demon, he advanced across the room, quite regardless of the three men who stood watching the scene.

"An' now you dirty double-dealin' perjurin' female," he snarled in a voice in which a thousand devils seemed to be struggling, "you're goin' to get yourn. I'm agoin' to smash all them pretty teeth o' yours down your red, lyin' throat if it's the las' thing I ever do. I'm—"

His words were broken off by the woman's shrill scream. With a catlike bound, she leaped behind Oliver and clung terror-stricken to his coat tails. Where a moment before she had been a snarling, defiant creature, she was now a shrieking, trembling piece of femininity who saw vengeance, swift and sure, sweeping down on her like an express train.

"Oh," she shrieked again and again, "save me—save me! He's—he's a devil! He's a devil in human form! Don't let him—don't let him touch me!"

Luke McCracken seemed moved to action by her terror-stricken cries. With his yellow irregular teeth gritting

audibly he circled around the unfortunate Oliver who in turn became the center of a circle in which the woman kept swinging about him. "Take him away! Take him away! Stop him! Capture him!" she screamed violently. "He's a devil, I tell you."

At this juncture Mattox stepped forward, interposing himself directly in front of the ex-convict's body. "Here, here, Luke," he said soothingly; "hold your horses, old man. What's wrong? Tell us about it. What are you trying to do?"

"W'at am I tryin' to do?" snarled the other. "You know this woman, well as me. She's the female cat what give me three-year-nine in stir with her lyin' tongue. I'm goin' to beat th' daylights out of her in a way that's never been done yet; then I'm willin' to go back to stir for life. Leave me alone! I'll get her!" And he roughly thrust aside the younger man who stood in front of him.

Mattox, however, as quickly dodged in front of the infuriated man. "Leave her alone, Luke! The police are going to give her what's-what before we're done with her. Don't you get mixed up in it. She's—"

"That's all right," snapped the other. "But I want to feel my own fist agin' her purty teeth. I never dreamed o' such luck as findin' her in this burg. When I went to that there curio dump you was tellin' me of yesterday mornin' to look over the place and see how the land lay, I seen her coming out of there in her veil. She raises the face net as she slips into the cab, an' I gets one little glimpse at her phiz. Believe me, but it sure looks like the treacherous mug o' that devil I was married to. But I wasn't sure. I wasn't on the side where the scar was. For fifty cents I hired a boy on a bicycle to tail her. He comes back a half hour later and says she went to the Ontario Hotel on the Nort' Side. I beats it up there an' for three dollars a week rents a dirty little cheap room on Ontario Street across from th' corner

o' th' hotel, where I been watchin' her gettin' in and out o' her taxicab all yesterday an' to-day.

"To-day she raises her veil again," McCracken went on, "climbs in, and I sees what I been expectin' to see—the white scar on 'er right cheek. Then I knows it's that former wench o' mine, and I hires me a machine with the last o' th' ten the State give me, an' it brings me here on her heels. An' here I am, Dirk, and I'm goin' to beat the livin' daylights out of her, or I'll fight all three of you."

"No; you're not going to do anything so foolish as that yet, Luke," said Mattox firmly. "But one question first: You spent all night in a little cheap room across the street from the Ontario so that you could watch this woman going in and out? Can you prove that?"

"I did," said the ex-convict savagely; "but I can't prove it. How c'n a guy prove he's been a-sittin' in a room by hisself all night? Eh? And what's that got to do with it anyway, I'd like t' know? The main thing is that I found out what I wanted. And now she'll pay. She'll—"

At this point Oliver spoke up. "My man, just hold your horses." He shook savagely at the woman, who clung desperately to his coat tails. "Keep your hands off, madam." He glanced toward Luke again. "I'm an officer. You can't lay your fingers on her if I put you under arrest, and I'll do it if you take one more step in this direction."

He spun clear around and again shook himself free of the woman. "No; keep your paws off of me. Now, confound you, do you know what I'm going to do? Either you talk fully and completely on the subject of that green jade hand, or else my friend here, also Mr. Wah Hung Fung and I, will lock those swinging windows over there, leave this room, lock the door behind us, and leave you and your ex-hubby here together for one half hour. Which do you prefer?"

"Oh, oh, oh!" the woman moaned. "Take—take him away. I'll—I'll talk! I'll do anything! Don't—don't leave me alone in here with him. He's a human devil!"

"That's sufficient," Oliver declared. He turned toward Luke McCracken. "Step into that next room, please." He pointed toward the door of the library.

McCracken seemed to hesitate. Oliver's voice grew more authoritative. "Will you go, or shall I be forced to put you under arrest?"

McCracken turned sullenly on his heels with a parting look of consuming rage on his features. "I'll go; but I'll fix you, Sadie, an' I'll fix you good before I'm done." Then he marched through the door, now held open by Wah Hung Fung who had arisen, and into the next room.

In a second Wah had crossed the floor and called Chang. "Chang," he said when the servant came, "sit in that next room with this—er—guest, please." Then he turned the huge copper key in the lock and dropped it into his pocket.

"And now," said Oliver sternly, "how about it?"

The woman came out from behind him. On her white forehead were drops of perspiration that mingled oddly with the black penciling of her thin eyebrows. She seemed strangely cowed and meek. She dropped into a chair as though she were unable to stand up.

"Wh—what do you want to know?" she asked, with a sudden apprehensive glance toward the door that shut off all that she feared in the world.

"This Wong Kwei who lived at your rooming house was really Charley Foy?" queried Oliver. "He told you so, before he died?"

She nodded. "He—he told me. Yes; he was Charley Foy —of San Francisco. He—he liked me. He left me the story of—of——"

"Of the two hundred thousand in bonds and bills he carried away in a valise," put in Oliver. "What did he do with it? Where did he stash it?"

The woman swallowed hard. Her breath came with difficulty. She seemed to be straining. Wah Hung Fung, at this juncture, withdrew the great copper key from his gorgeous

blouse and turned in his chair toward the door. Her words came quick and fast now.

"He—he got off at a little town in Ohio, Bentleyville, a hundred miles—this—this side of Toledo. He—he thought there was a Federal officer on—on the same train. He—he was frightened. He walked back in the country till he came to a big cement post that marks the junction of—of—Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan. On the road he found he—he went north about two miles into Michigan till he came to a big stretch of—of prairie land where over in the middle of it was a huge white rock as high as a man's shoulders."

"At the base of which he promptly buried it," said Oliver. "Then why the hand?"

The woman sighed a long, deep, regretful sigh. Then she went on. "Not Charley," she informed the three men meaningly. "It was bright moonlight. The country was deserted. He—he looked at the number penciled on the hand and took that many paces from the rock. He——"

"Number on the hand?" ejaculated Wah Hung Fung gravely. "There is no number on the hand."

The woman looked out of the window a moment. Her face mirrored the intense struggle going on in her soul. But the consciousness that she was beaten must have attained the ascendancy for the time being, for she went on again:

"There—there was a number penciled on it, though. He had had an argument with a fellow employee in the Chino-American Bank back in San Francisco on the subject of weights. They had made a guess on various articles—including Charley's pocket-piece. To prove the argument he weighed it on a gold scales and wrote out on it the weight in grains; and when weeks afterward he was—was about to bury the stolen currency, he—he—decided to take a pace for every grain the thing weighed. After the satchel was carefully buried, he wet his thumb and washed off the number on it. He—"

"Such precautions are typical of the Chinese mind and race," declared Wah to Oliver with a smile. "A Chinese will never commit to paper any detail or note of a crime. To do so is supposed to bring speedy retribution. And Charley Foy, brought up in Foy Yuh Yuan's household, must have had a typical Chinese mind in many respects."

"Charley was so ill, I suppose, at the time he told you all this that he couldn't recall the number of grains—or paces?" Oliver inquired.

"He—he was delirious half the time. I—I got the facts from him bit by bit. He was mixed up in the distance. He seemed to think he had gone two hundred thousand paces."

"Simply got the distance mixed up with the money," said Oliver. He came over to the woman. "And what direction did he pace off?" he asked quietly.

A strange light, a light of half triumph, flashed into the woman's eyes. She shook her head dolefully. "I don't know. He didn't know himself."

"And now we know you are lying." Oliver's voice had turned to a sneer. "Sooner or later, dear lady, I knew you would be unable to keep to the truth. You must revert to lying sooner or later. It's in your kind."

He gripped his hands on her shoulders and glanced into her eyes. "Sadie Hippolyte, suppose as an example that the hand weighed three hundred grains? To excavate that satchel on that information alone you would have had to assume a discrepancy of several feet in a matter of three hundred paces. All in all it would amount to from six to ten feet. You yourself would have had to dig up a ring of earth whose width was ten feet, its center that white rock, its radius three hundred average size paces. The area of that ring would be six and two-tenth times three hundred paces, or say six hundred feet, multiplied by ten feet. Its area would be"—he figured a second—"would be thirty-seven thousand seven hundred square feet. Dear lady, you had no

intentions of digging up all that. You *do* know the direction. Now come out with it!"

The woman had in the meantime become markedly defiant, perhaps now reassured by the thickness of the door between her and McCracken.

"That's all I know," she snarled. "You've got all the facts."

Oliver turned to Wah. "Let in McCracken," he ordered firmly.

Wah rose.

"Come, Mattox," Oliver went on, "we'll go to another part of the house and relinquish this room to ex-wife and ex-hubby. Come!"

"No—wait—wait," she said fervently. "I—I was lying. I—I am not myself. The direction—no one knows it. There's something—something strange about the hand, Charley said. It—it floats on water in the same direction always, neither north nor south nor east nor west. There was a pool of water in a hollow on the top of the rock—rain water. He took a tiny circle of paper and floated the hand on the pool of water. Then he paced off in the direction the finger pointed. That's—that's all I know. The hand points to the direction. Without its weight no one can determine the number of paces. Without floating it, no one can tell what direction to pace. They'd have to find—"

Mattox spoke up. "She's lying again, Oliver. She can't—"

"I'm not lying," she said, looking fiercely at him. "I only know that if it's floated on water it points in some certain direction. Why, I don't know. Neither did Charley. But it does it, just the same. It—"

"Eureka!" cried Oliver triumphantly. "I have it, gentlemen." He turned to Wah. "Mr. Wah, will you have a servant bring a bowl of water, a sheet of paper, and a scissors, please. I have the explanation of the thing."

Wah clapped his hands three times and a servant ap-

peared. "Please bring one bowl of cold water, a scissors, and a sheet of paper." The man disappeared.

"Dirk," Oliver went on, "do you recall how I studied mineralogy and geology in college, and even took the advance courses in them?"

"Do I? Well I guess yes, you old scientific bug! And what about them?"

"Simply this," said Oliver. "Jade is a mineral; the particular kind of jade that was used for this hand, hundreds of years ago, was mixed with Chinese magnetite which is no different from magnetite found anywhere else in the world. In this hand, therefore, concealed somewhere in it, and probably accounting for the dappled effect in one or two spots as it comes out on the surface, is a longitudinal sliver of strongly magnetic magnetite—or shall I call it lodestone?

"If the hand were suspended by a thread," he continued, "the torsion of the fibers in the thread would be too great to allow it to take its natural position. But if it is so placed that there is no friction nor torsion either—at least so that the friction is reduced to a minimum—that strongly magnetic sliver will place itself parallel with the lines of force of the earth's magnetic field, running north and south. When it does so, the finger of the hand points in some fixed direction—we don't know what—depending wholly on the relative angle between the streak of magnetite and the longitudinal axis of the index finger in the carving. Then if it—"

His words were broken off by the servant who appeared in the side door bearing a long shears, a sheet of paper, and a huge Chinese lily bowl full of water.

After he had deposited them on the table and left, Oliver quickly cut from the sheet a small circle which he laid carefully on the surface of the water. There it floated perfectly, due to the physical phenomenon known as "surface tension." This done, he laid the green jade hand on the

circle. He rapped roughly on the table with the handle of the shears, then carried them far across the room and deposited them where they could have no magnetic effect.

Wah and Mattox were now crowding around the bowl, watching the results. The circle of paper, bearing the hand, began to turn like some sluggish compass needle whose movement was impeded. It swung to a position of quiescence, then stopped, then came slowly back a shorter distance, and oscillating slowly through two or three shorter and shorter movements came to rest in a position quite at variance with that in which Oliver had first placed it. It was now pointing toward a huge chair across the room, and Mattox, figuring out roughly the position of the house on the street, saw that it was somewhere between east and south.

Oliver now turned it in another direction with the tip of his pencil; and rapping the table with his knuckles this time, the finger once more oscillated slowly back till it pointed at the same chair.

A tense silence followed the peculiar demonstration in magnetics. It was broken by Wah Hung Fung. "We have seen enough," he declared. "We have what we want—the secret of Charley Foy's buried two hundred thousand dollars which belong to my countrymen." He clapped his hands again. The servant appeared as if by magic. "Fix up my American clothing at once in my bedroom and pack my traveling bag."

He turned to Oliver. "You will come, Mr. Oliver, as a witness, I hope. We can find a jeweler's scales in the neighborhood. We can catch a train for Toledo inside of an hour which will bring us there by evening—quicker, by far, than if we wait all afternoon for the night air transport going East. Once out in this district near Bentleyville we can work by moonlight. You will come of course?"

"Of course I'll come," said Oliver with a smile. "And in the meantime what shall we do with—er—our friend here, Sadie Hippolyte? Did you say you had a basement room

downstairs well barred? The one where you give recalcitrant Chinese of the district a few tastes of bamboo cane?"

"Such a room I have," the Chinese murmured.

"Or would you prefer, madam," Oliver said, turning to the feminine member of the assemblage, "to leave the house with Mr. McCracken, your ex-husband?"

"I'll take the basement room," she replied, "if—if the walls are thick and the windows are barred and there's a good stout lock on the door!"

CHAPTER XXVI

"HOW DID YOU KNOW?"

AFTER parting with Oliver and Wah Hung Fung in front of the house of the Chinese dignitary, Mattox went back to his office alone, where he sat throughout the afternoon with his feet on the window sill, moodily smoking and gazing out at the tall skyscrapers and pausing only long enough at times to instruct the energetic Steever in various details of the clerical work.

But one thing now buzzed in his head, and that seemed to exclude every other possible idea. McCracken had not killed the curio dealer, if his story were true; and it rang true even though it was clear that the unlucky ex-convict could never prove an alibi consisting merely of his sitting in a tiny darkened room in an Ontario Street lodging house watching the Ontario Hotel across the way. Gad, that was a bad thing for McCracken, that sequestering of himself from human eyes over a fateful period during which a shopkeeper's safe was attacked and the shopkeeper himself killed! What defence would McCracken have if and when—as it assuredly would—the inevitable police net pulled him in? Mattox shook his head. He felt to blame somehow for McCracken's unhappy position. And he resolved that if the latter ever came miraculously through this thing with a sound skin, he should receive from Mattox personally the three hundred dollars that he needed to get a fresh start in life.

Nor had Wah Hung Fung committed that attempted burglary and successful murder. That was now plain. All he had wanted had been the green jade hand, and he had possessed it since the moment when he had had it taken forcibly from the person of the thieving Li Ling Lee yesterday.

The woman had not done it, for she would hardly have stayed in the city and pursued Wah Hung Fung with offers if she had been the guilty one. Indeed, these three persons were to all intents and purposes clear of the crime and the guilt attached to it.

This being the case, but one person was left; and that was the man who had either bought an airways ticket to New Orleans for an alibi, and then unluckily omitted to destroy it, or who had actually had pressing business in the gulf city, necessitating his traveling by air, but which pressing business had been thrown to one side in order to attempt a foolish, rash thing on East 22nd Street in the middle of the night. And that was the man who had wanted the Vindelinus de Spira in Jech's safe almost as much as he wanted his own daughter; the man who was Iolanthe's father. Fool, fool, fool that Silverthorne had been, Mattox reflected grimly, to have taken such desperate steps to secure the Vindelinus! What would ultimately be the terrible outcome of it all?

Once he called Iolanthe's number and getting her fresh young voice on the wire spoke briefly: "This is Dirk. Your father returned yet, dear?"

"No; not yet, Dirk. Why do you ask?"

"Just wondered; that's all."

"You are coming to-night to see me as usual?" she queried.

"Yes; surely." He almost groaned as he said it and with a good-by hung up the receiver.

Fifteen minutes later a grimy messenger-boy appeared with dragging heels in his office bearing an equally grimy envelope in which was the page of Chinese hieroglyphics found underneath Jech's safe, and a scribbled note from Oliver. "I'm suggesting, old man," it read, "that you return this yourself to our now mutual friend, Honorable Wah, since you were the discoverer of it. By the time this reaches you, however, via one of our blue-capped Winged Mercuries,

Wah and I will be en route for Toledo. Look for further bulletins."

Mattox smiled sadly. "Punctilious Oliver." And he stowed the leaf away in his breast pocket.

The remainder of the afternoon was passed as the first part of it had been, moodily thinking and staring across the dark chasm of Printingtown's main street. Once he wondered what success Wah and Oliver were going to have, and looking at his watch realized that before many more hours they would be following the motion of the hand in the field described by the cowed woman of that afternoon.

When half past five o'clock came, he got up from his chair and spoke to Steever: "Steever, I hate to make you do this on your first night with me, but I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to work overtime to-night."

"Glad to do it!" said the other man. "Rather do it than sit in a cheerless hall bedroom. What do you want me to do?"

Mattox fumbled in his pocket for one of the two pass-keys to the office door that the management had given him when he had rented the place. One of them he handed to Steever. "Nothing much in the way of work," he said, "except to sit here until at least ten o'clock and wait for a telegram I'm expecting from Bentleyville, Ohio. Two friends of mine are engaged on a vital piece of business there, and they suggested telegraphing me here as soon as the thing was settled, one way or the other. But at the time I quite forgot that I would be visiting to-night on the South Side. Now here are your directions," he went on: "Run out and get yourself a bite to eat. Then come back here. Sit here and read the paper until ten o'clock, and if this telegram comes, I want it brought out to me at once to No. 4010 South Park Way. Ask at the door there for Mr. Dirk Mattox. That's all. Can you find South Park Way?"

"South Park Way?" repeated the other. "I know roughly where it is from studying a street guide. And the number is

4010?" He wrote it down on his wrist with a moistened indelible pencil. "Hunky dory for me. I'll hang here till midnight, if necessary."

"No; don't do that," said Mattox. "Stay until ten o'clock or a few minutes after, and by that time I'll be leaving South Park Way. I'll probably come back here myself then and stay on till midnight. And there's the possibility that the telegram might not come at all. But I certainly want it the minute it does." And with one or two more parting instructions he departed from the office and left Steever in a quick-lunch room down on Dearborn Street.

At half past seven that night he left his room, and more or less morosely made his way out to South Park Way. Iolanthe herself, Mammy Johnson hovering in the rear hallway like a great black crow, answered the door. Her wondrous dark eyes gazed curiously out at him.

"Any word from your father?" he asked, almost before he had got into the vestibule.

"Dirk!" she exclaimed. "What *is* the matter? Is there anything wrong—any air crashes or anything?"

He shook his head. "No, dear. Not a word of any crash in any of the papers."

They went into the little parlor, and when they were alone the girl crept over and placed her slim white arms about his neck. "Dirk, what did he say to you? Is our marriage to be with his permission—or not to be?"

But Dirk Mattox was seeing visions which this girl at his side could not see. He saw the police at last finding Jech's missing key—their entrance into the latter's safe; he saw the inventory of the contents made by some specialist. He saw the Vindelinus being acclaimed as a great new find, worth a fortune. He saw the eyes of the police narrowing. He saw some astute policeman acquiring a list of bibliophiles over the entire United States and particularly Chicago. He saw Horatio Silverthorne called in to the detective bureau, ostensibly to be questioned about books in

general, but to have his words—his contradictions—taken down by a convenient stenographer. He saw the net tighten, tighten on the bibliophile. He saw the police getting his fingerprints by a trick; a comparison of them being made with those on the tools. He saw the sickening newspaper sensation when the story should break. And he visioned the trial in the criminal court, the— Indeed, his visions told him that this was a crisis—a crisis for the girl who sat at his side, a girl who was proud, proud indeed. He answered her quickly, patting her smooth rose-petal cheeks with his hands.

"Our marriage," he said quietly, "I feel is assured. I have a belief that your father will withdraw all his objections—at least, that he won't hold them forth any longer—and it is my wish that we be married within the next few days. Do not ask me why, but just try to believe that unless I loved you as dearly as I do, I would not ask such a precipitate thing."

She looked at him with a most curious look in her eyes. It baffled him.

At last she spoke: "I am glad you feel that way, Dirk. Life—life is a most peculiar thing. And I want to ask you a strange question. Would—could—anything occur that would—well that would affect your pride so that you wouldn't ask me to marry you—that is, you wouldn't proceed with that essential and sacred ceremony of placing the engagement ring on my finger?"

A shadow crossed his face. He studied her carefully. Her words could indicate but one thing. Somehow, some way, she had learned? She had found out the truth. She knew her father had not gone to New Orleans last night. She knew in some way that he had wanted the Vindelinus; that it was in Jech's safe; that Jech had been shot dead. How could she have found it all out? But one thing was certain—it rang in his ears: She was trembling inwardly lest when the horrible truth—the notoriety—came, that he, Dirk Mattox,

would back out from their tacit, but so far unsolemnized, agreement on marriage.

It did not take him long to answer her. He crushed her to him fiercely, and it almost seemed to him that she clung protectingly to him. "Nothing," he said almost gruffly, "nothing on God's earth could make me back out from placing that ring on your finger—from marrying you!"

She held him off for a second, gazing into his eyes, a look of relief in her own. "But, Dirk, you are so—so—proud," she asserted doubtfully. "That is one of your most pronounced characteristics. You might say this now—and later think differently."

Poor little girl, he reflected miserably. She was afraid; she knew what might come—the trial, the newspaper columns, the horrible publicity.

"Yes, I have pride," he said, "but how can I prove my words?"

"You are a man," she said, "who if he ever placed a ring on a girl's finger would never go back on the compact that signified." She pointed at the peculiarly set diamond ring on his finger, neither excessively masculine nor feminine in its setting. "Oh, Dirk, you do not understand," she said, sighing, "and I can't explain. But will you—will you let—"

"I will," he said proudly, guessing at last what she meant. And he took off the ring from his own finger and placed it on hers.

The girl leaned over in a sudden outburst of relief, and kissed him on the lips. "Thank Heaven!" she exclaimed.

Her next words were broken off by the clicking of the latch in the hall. A moment later, there strode into the parlor no one but Horatio Silverthorne himself, looking very tired, very weary, very worried, and carrying in his hand a bulky, heavy suitcase. He sank into a chair and closed his eyes.

"Good Heavens, but I'm tired, tired, tired," he said with a deep sigh. "And weary of everything, too." Then, as

though he had neglected a polite convention, he added: "And how are you, Mattox?"

"Very well, thank you." Mattox studied the man carefully. The latter now seemed to be an individual who had been through an ordeal, who had suffered a severe blow, who was world weary; a man who needed a good long sleep, preferably administered in the form of a doctor's potion.

Mattox frowned. His own task was going to be more difficult and disagreeable than he had expected. "I am wondering whether I can see you alone for a few minutes," he asked, trying to keep the gravity in his voice from showing.

The tired man's voice did not change, but his eyes opened suddenly. "Alone?" he said sharply. "What about?"

Mattox looked at Iolanthe. "You do not object, dear?"

The girl rose, puzzled. "Certainly not. Just call me when you've finished with your talk." Then she left the room, closing the door gently behind her.

When she had gone, Mattox's voice grew stern. "In God's name, Mr. Silverthorne, why—why did you take that extreme method for getting the Vindelinus de Spira?"

Silverthorne sat straight up in his chair. His face tensed. "Then you—you—you know that I got it?" he said in a low voice, a voice in which utter dumbfoundment struggled with incredulity. "How—how in God's name did you find that out, Mattox?"

CHAPTER XXVII

CHIEF O'TOOLE FOCUSES HIS LIGHT ON AFFAIRS

MR. THOMAS STEEVER, his first day's work in Chicago satisfactorily completed, was seated on the broad window-sill of the one-room office of the Mattox Noiseless Platen Company in the Ellsworth Building, waiting a certain telegram for which sole purpose he had been left there, and watching the semi-twilight steal over the rooftops of Printingtown's moderately-sized skyscrapers. He had smoked a couple of cigarettes, economically indeed, to their very last stub-ends—and if he had known any more of the details of this business he would have filled in his time working; but as it was, there was nothing to do but sit on the window-sill and wait. And thus he sat, seeing in turn the great red ball of fire become an elliptical crimson disk on the edge of the smoky Western fringe of the city, then drop out of sight in a welter of purples and lavenders, then the cool grey dusk, followed by the streets below becoming deserted, and then the twinkle of lights popping forth one by one in the office windows of belated workers.

It might be, he reflected—but wholly without rancor—that he would be tied here yet for many hours, and if so, he might do worse than to go down and get himself an evening paper; and as he thought on the expediency of leaving a note pinned on the office door, his ruminations were brought sharply to a close as a telegram—no doubt the very telegram for which he was waiting—arrived. The blue-coated messenger boy extended it, and Steever signed for it. "Where's this from, boy?" he asked brusquely.

"Bentle'ville, Ohio, mister," was the lad's response; and so Steever knew that his vigil was at an end.

He put out the lights, locked up the office and proceeded

out onto deserted Dearborn Street. Standing at the curbing for a few seconds studying his street guide intently in the fast gathering dusk, he proceeded around the corner to South State Street which, by virtue of its extreme length and its carline, he was beginning to see was like a huge spinal cord traversing the entire South Side of this gargantuan jungle known as Chicago, and with scores of spinal nerves branching out from it at every few blocks, consisting of east and west-bound cross-town lines. And by two such simple right-angled progressions he could, he saw, practically deposit himself on any south side threshold, including that one whither he was bound: 4110 South Park Way, where his employer waited the yellow envelope that was now ensconced in Steever's breast pocket. So aboard a car filled with chattering negroes of all sizes, shapes, shades and elongations, he projected himself.

The grey dusk had merged into the first shades of evening when the car came to an abrupt grating stop, many miles this side of the 4000's, where Steever knew he must transfer and ride east some miles to a happier, cleaner district; and the conductor, from his cage in the rear shouted: "All off! Farswego! Subway work. Walk t' Wabash Avenoo an' transfer, or take South State one block tother side o' de tear-up."

Steever piled off with the rest of the disgruntled passengers. The reason the human cargo had been directed to re-ship itself on other lines was here quite obvious: the car tracks at the intersecting thoroughfare named 22nd Street, or rather a set of wooden roofs on which they had been laid, were all torn up for many feet in all directions; a gang of laborers, working by flaming oil flambeaus, were pouring concrete from a rumbling concrete mixer whose motor was hitched by long poles to the trolley wires, and wheel-barrows were scurrying to and fro like queer lumbering flies. Twisted iron rods such as are used for re-enforcing concrete were strewn in long bundles about the corner,

making traffic for man, vehicle, or beast nearly impossible. But while Mr. Thomas Steever could not be expected to know that all this apparent wreckage connoted the firm foundations of an underground curve and steel incline combined, from which some day not long hence subway trains were to rise miraculously out of the bowels of the earth and, crawling up upon the L-road to the east, become new creatures of transportation, he was well aware of a very familiar aspect to the neighborhood in spite of the fact that last time he viewed it the present scene of violent operations was being conducted under wooden roofs planted in the street. For this was the very cross street down which he had come from Chinatown the night he had picked up the green jade hand in the bowl of chop-suey. There was that red near-beer saloon—that defunct movie house with tattered lithographs flapping in the breeze—that silk awning beyond it, reaching out to the sidewalk from some upstairs speakeasy or cabaret.

Automatically he gazed east on 22nd Street to that curious little store through which he had made his first stake in Chicago considering that the information concerning his sale there of a wholly insignificant trinket had proved sentimentally worth the ridiculously stupendous sum of fifty dollars to a jet-haired, piercing-eyed and rather handsome woman in the Ontario Hotel on the north side whose ads he had glimpsed in the advertising columns in every newspaper that he opened to find work. But very much to his surprise, in front of the swinging sign out in front, a khaki-clad police-officer stood, with a group of ragamuffins standing in awe about him, and a number of passersby stopping at intervals and reading something on the windows. To Steever, who had an eternal bump of investigative fervor, if not a downright hypertrophied curiosity, this combination of elements provided nothing less than a stress and a strain to his consciousness; so, transfer forgotten for the nonce, he trudged eastward as fast as he

could to that shop down whose steps his feet had walked on his first night in this city.

The windows which before gave a clear, although dusty view through themselves to anyone on the sidewalk, were now coated from top to bottom with a chalk-wash, and on each had been written with a stick or something the inscription:

> SHOW STARTS AT 9:30!!!!
>
> Admission $1.
>
> *MOST UNUSUAL EXHIBITION EVER PRESENTED.*
>
> ASK THE PATROLMAN!

Brow narrowed, he turned to the patrolman. "I say, brother," he asked. "What's happened here?"

"If you'd-a read th' pypers," said the patrolman, who evidently was tired and cross from a long vigil involving the answering of hundreds of curiosity hounds, "you'd-a knowed as wot the ould bloke wot run this shop was killed by a peterman this mornin'. Shot dead. The bloody 'ound wot done it tried t' get into 'is syfe."

"The devil you say!" Steever whistled. This was too uncannily much like the introduction of a fiction plot into his own life. He tried to peer unsuccessfully in the doorway, but curiosity mongers had been quite circumvented by chalk-wash freely applied here also.

"No, brother," he said. "The only part of the papers I've been reading are the hind ends—where the want ads are." He gazed up again at the cryptic announcement sketched on the main window. "And what's the show?" he asked. "It says 'ask the patrolman.'" With which he pointed to the inscription that authorized him thus to annoy a khaki-clad officer of the law.

The patrolman sighed. He shifted his Sam Browne belt

weariedly. He was evidently a very tired officer, and on duty long past his quitting hour. He wiped off his very red stolid face with a bandanna handkerchief. "Well, me lad, it's th' chief wot's gowin' to give a talk on crime an' this pertic'ler crime tonight, at nine-thirty," he said. "And 'tis then a fymous detective is gowin' to show 'is detectin' methods. One dollar it'll cost you." He felt weariedly in his coat pocket and withdrew a packet of bright red tickets. " 'Ere —I'm suppowsed to 'ave you read this. Tells ye all about it." He handed Steever a single ticket, and as an arc-lamp on the curbing burst into a sudden clattering glow, heralding the official night, the latter curiously read its hastily printed inscription, his lips curving a bit in disdain as he perceived that it threw a shaft of cruel ridicule against some unfortunate fellow mortal. He looked up.

"Say, brother, if I had a dollar to toss away just to see a poor devil of a half-wit make a fool out of himself, I'd use fourteen cents for a round-trip streetcar ride and go out to some feeble-minded institution and see a couple dozen of 'em. Then I'd be in eighty-six cents." He thrust the ticket back. "Although I *would* like to hear a good criminologist speak."

"The man that's gowin' t' towlk is one o' the best criminologists in the city," said the patrolman emphatically, and with a certain evident loyalty. He paused, hand outstretched, in regaining the ticket. "I s'y, lad, 'ow'd you like to get into the show for narthing? Syve you a blinkin' dollar, too, that's wot."

"Lead on, MacDuff," said Steever. "That's me." And to himself he added: "If anybody ought to have a special interest in that old boy who was killed, it ought to be me." And aloud he queried the other: "What's the way?"

The patrolman now waved back the ticket. " 'Tis every uniformed man in th' 22nd Street stytion 'as 'ad to tyke one o' these tickets, and 'tis meself 'as 'ad a new boiby this mornin'. Wot do I want wit' any tickets? Now, me lad, if

ye'll go over to the 22nd Street stytion, and tell 'em Hines is goin' off jooty in thirty more minutes—and they can do as they bloomin' well wants to do, I'll give ye my ticket. Will ye do it?"

It was evident that Mr. Hines had not been receiving proper satisfaction by phoning in to the switchboard operator other than, perhaps, to be commanded to remain on duty, and that he was adopting a form of announcement to which there could be no comeback. Or, possibly barring this, it could easily be that he was afraid to depart too peremptorily without some sort of warning of this nature.

As for Steever, he smiled a bit in spite of himself. He pocketed the red pasteboard. "Sure—I'll do it. Where'll I find the station?"

In which simple acceptance of a quite innocent errand Mr. Thomas Steever little dreamed that he was to become shortly the official recipient of strange and amazing facts —facts more strange than even those many queer ones he had encountered in his own varied career. But from such tiny rivulets do great streams grow!

The man in the khaki and Sam-Browne belt was answering his question. "Go along this 'ere street west—st'y on the syme side—an' you'll come to it. Says 'Thirty-Fifth District Stytion' on th' stone cowping over the door, an' there's a green lamp on either side. Tell 'em," he added savagely, "I've sowld eighty-five tickets and I'm gowin', money, tickets 'n all, in thirty minutes. That's—that's final."

Steever turned and made his way hurriedly along the street. Shops, drugstores, were all illuminated in full force now. He could easily deliver this message, get over to South Park Way, deliver the telegram to his employer, and get back in time to loaf around in front for an hour, watch the crowd go in, and then himself view this rather peculiar performance which, for a lone dweller in a strange big city, promised more entertainment than standing on a street

corner or sitting in a hall-bedroom could provide. It wasn't but five or six minutes at the most before he reached the police station. He recognized it even from a distance by the two green lights on either side of the door. At the very stone coping in which was carved "Thirty-Fifth District Police Station" and which marked the entrance, he stopped short and scratched his chin troubledly and reflectively. A host of reminiscences came crowding now into his mind, episodes of many cities, in which wit, sharpened by hunger, had had to match itself with the staid rules of authority. Even one episode in which—but gazing down on his very neat though cheap checked suit, feeling gingerly of his new green plaid cap, and his cleanly shaven face, remembering that he had business connections, a fixed domicile, currency in his pocket, he gave a half-laugh of reassurance and urged himself in.

Inside, the place was full of men and cigar smoke, the men standing around in knots or threading back and forth before the desk sergeant's lamplighted desk, the smoke curling itself in a thick blanket at the top of the big room. The assemblage, however, after but a second's scrutiny resolved itself into the usual fixed classifications that comprise the miscellany filling a police station at any hour of the day or night: plain-clothes men with thick soles and protruding jaws; cub reporters cracking jokes with one another; patrolmen coming off duty and going on; angry individuals swearing out warrants for other individuals; and hard-faced men signing papers which were bail bonds for no doubt other hard-faced men downstairs.

Steever endeavored to approach the desk sergeant in the crush at the desk.

"I say, brother," he began, "your man Hines in front of that curio store says to tell the chief that——"

The desk sergeant flicked a thumb towards a closed door across the room, over whose transom a bright light poured, and through whose glass could be seen plenty more wreaths

of smoke. "In there, fella, if it's anything to do with the 22nd Street show tonight."

Which, being precisely the case, Steever proceeded to the door in question. He rapped. A doorkeeper opened it. Steever opened his mouth to speak.

"News of paramount and superlative significance to one, your chief," was the throat-filling and somewhat facetious *open sesame* with which he prepared to walk past the Cerberus; but he got this bulky greeting out not at all, no further, in fact, than the first word "News," when the doorkeeper motioned him to a chair and closed the door in back of him.

The degree with which the shutting of the door closed out the sounds from the barnlike room without, filled with humans and their hum, plus the profound air of tension within, momentarily drove from Steever's mind the errand he had come on. For something of decided importance was to come off here, that was certain. A quadrangle of nine chairs had been drawn up—chairs which had wide handles on the right side on which notebooks or paper could be placed: and while none were occupied in the conventional manner for which chairs were designed, they were filled with occupants who sat jauntily on the handles, on the top of the backs, or who sprawled in one with a foot or feet on the adjoining one. That they were members of the Chicago press was indisputable. Their blithe air, their cigarettes, their peculiar *savoir faire* which was that of the press itself, the coatlessness of two or three and the hats cocked over the ears of several more, precluded any other possibility. A few crayon enlargements of former lights of the Chicago police department, judging from the stiff uniforms of another day, were the only articles of adornment for the plain walls. The shades were drawn down completely. A short, squat desk stood at the front of the quadrangle of chairs, with a stiff chair in place as though a speaker were going to address the press in a very few moments. Steever, puz-

zling a bit as to whether he should, by virtue of his welcome when he uttered the word "News," avail himself of a little easement to his bump of curiosity, now pulsating definitely, or state his errand and get out of here, saw the doorkeeper rapidly check off a list of names, or else newspapers, and then press an electric call button imbedded in the wall. "Be seated, gents," he called out. "Take chairs, all of youse."

The assemblage at once flowed out of its assortment of postures and, dropping either into chairs or proper positions, became seven individuals, sitting upright at attention. That something important was afoot was highly evident. Steever too, finding himself rather conspicuous as the lone standee, dropped into the nearest chair to him. A green baize door at one end of the room opened. A man with a thick, red, beefy neck, hair peppered generously with grey, and an old battered blue police cap cocked back on his head, entered.

"Evening, boys," was his greeting. "All here, I see. Good." He looked at his watch and closed it with a sharp snap.

"Evening, Chief O'Toole," a couple of the men replied.

The official addressed as O'Toole sat down at the small squat desk. His eyes roved over the assemblage, passing over Steever with the same blank gaze as they passed over the remaining faces. And as those faces, too, were blank, it was evident that the assemblage, summoned individually, had not the least inkling of the nature of the information to be divulged.

"Glad to see you all here, boys. Let's see—every paper represented? *American? Herald-Ex? Times? Post? Tribune? News?* I see you're more than represented. Fair enough." He paused. "By the way, which one of you boys covers the electrocutions down at the County Jail?"

"I'm the electrocution man," said a tall sallow fellow with a sad face.

"I'm doing 'em now for the *American*," said a pudgy little fat fellow.

"Good," said the man O'Toole.

Steever pursed his lips into a painful though silent whistle. His face lost its air of jocundity. What sort of a gruesome thing had he strolled into? He decided to make himself known, deliver his innocent message and bow his way courteously out of this lethiferous chamber, when the speaker's next words quite made him sit up in spite of himself.

"Well then, Stearns, and you too, Davis, how'd you boys like to cover a quadruple electrocution for your next job? Four people? Wouldn't a cooking like that be the biggest execution story you ever covered in all your lives?"

The descriptive specialist on executions who had first spoken stared at the man addressed as Chief O'Toole "Why, Chief, you don't mean—"

"I mean, Stearns, and the rest of you boys who don't happen to be assigned to attend cookings, that within a few months your papers will be on the streets at 10 in the morning with the grisly details of a quadruple execution for that Jech murder. We—I'll say I, by God—have worked it out from A to Izzard. Details. Identities. The whole shooting match. Like to have some names for your sheets tomorrow morning, eh?"

This last speech was a journalistic bombshell. Even the newspapermen were, for a wonder, struck dumb. Then two spoke at one time, a sloppy looking reporter with a soiled collar, and a dapper dandy with well-pressed suit who looked as though he had come out of a bandbox.

"For the luvva Mike, Chief, you don't mean to say you've cleaned up that Jech job? Have you got 'em in custody—"

"I told you, boys," said O'Toole blandly and quite calmly, "that they're the same as strapped in the chair this minute, nor do I need to inform any of you, either, I

guess, that in this state everybody who's in on a burglary job where a fellow is croaked is guilty of murder. However, be that as it may, you fellows here are the first to view the details of a piece of detective work that'll probably go out on the press wires all over the country." He paused. "And now you're getting the old notebooks ready, eh? Good."

He gazed with satisfaction about him. Mr. Thomas Steever promptly got out a piece of blank paper and a pencil.

"Now, boys, you of course all know that there's to be a sort of show tonight at the Jech shop. Nine-thirty she starts. You've all done mighty well over the telephone with your friends and the friends of your friends towards placing tickets, and on behalf of the plain-clothes men I thank you. The plain-clothes men, incidentally, have asked me to give a little talk tonight till the main performer comes on. He's Simple—our famous half-wit. So I'll probably be a sort of supper show to keep the crowd from getting impatient while the place fills up. I figure on giving 'em a little general talk on crime, yeggs, and so forth, and then I'm going to present the full details of what I'm going to describe to you privately here now. There's a little matter of a reward pending in this Jech case, as maybe you know, an' while you boys are a perfect set of witnesses as to who was the prior mind that worked out the complete solution of this case, it won't hurt none considering those money-hungry bozos down at the detective bureau to have a few hundred official witnesses more. Now I could have waited and had you all over to the shop later tonight and saved a little time and words, but I want to give you boys—my friends—the time to work this all up properly—with art, pictures, layouts and so forth—for your papers—at least, for the morning papers, since I guess you afternoon papers are out of luck. And you may want to ask questions, which you wouldn't have a chance to do tonight if you get over

to that Hawkshaw show. Again, a big fire or other story might break and you might be hard set to get this written up for your sheets. All right. Let's go."

He cocked back the big blue police cap on the other side of his stocky head, and sticking a long black cigar in his mouth which from time to time he used to emphasize parts of his amazing battery of facts and details, he let it protrude meanwhile unlighted from the corner of his mouth where he could chew hard on it, and talked out the remaining corner.

"Now, boys, when I tell you I've cleaned up the Jech job, I'm giving you a straight, inside piece of info and no pipe dream like such as you may have heard from that ass, Tom Mackin, the much-touted safe-robbery expert down at the bureau. Tom was in here this morning, bellyaching out his theories, and probably two or more of you have asked him a few questions. Of course Tom told you it was a one-man job, didn't he? But did he give you the description of the one man or tell you anything about him? No he didn't. For if that wise-boy ever learns to really add 2 and 2 together and make 4 out of 'em instead of 5 or 6, or 7 or 3, he'll be on his way to learning something. Tom's a practical police worker, though; I'll give him credit for that. He ain't flighty. It's just his brains lack a third dimension, that's all. But speaking of practical police work, I want to call your attention to an angle of this case that everyone of you ought to work into your stories. By that I mean the difference in the way in which the police work and the fiction detective works." He paused. "Know Oliver Oliver, any of you?"

Several men nodded.

"Well if any of you fellows got an art department that isn't working too hard tonight, and you need to fill up some space, get a photo of Oliver showing him with that silk hat of his, and a cape like—well—like Sherlock Holmes, and a magnifying glass in his hand; fix that on one side of

your layout, and fix a photo of your honorable orator here, Dennis O'Toole, with this same old blue cap—on the other. Your artists know how to draw the bodies in by hand and fit the faces in in halftone—and you can show O'Toole sittin' at a desk, tapping a figurative telegraph key and despatching officers out on jobs. Show the wires running up on a telegraph pole at the window, signifying the net of the law. And run your story between those photos." A couple of men who hitherto had made no notes suddenly made some, showing that O'Toole's suggestion had fallen on fertile grounds. O'Toole was speaking again. "For the chief thing about what I'm going to tell you is how it brings out abso-lootly the diff'rence between theoretical detective work and practical police work.

"Now, as an example of the first, this fellow Jech marked off a date on his calendar—the 17th of the coming December. Our theoretical detective works out the highly impractical information, from the fact that the circle surrounding the date is very round and very brilliant yet, instead of elliptical and faded, that it was done with a red grease pencil that was very short, so that it had to be held in all the fingers and operated by the arm instead of the hand, and that it might be in Jech's clothes. And that's where he winds up—there and no further. But this department, boys, myself to be specific, by that same red circle—or rather the date around which it was inscribed—winds up with the complete description and identity of everybody who went in through that back window into that shop in the early hours of this morning and everything that was done and said there, from the simplest motion to the actual killing."

The newspaper men looked from one to another with that jealous look which seemed to indicate their natural abomination of the idea that any other paper than their own was present at what looked like a most sensational story. But it was hopeless as a scoop. For all the papers were

there—and extra men to boot. A sigh of resignation seemed to be sighed in unison, to which Steever, now a hopeless prisoner by his own silence thus far, added his own for good measure, and the dead quiet that followed it told O'Toole that he was receiving the most tense attention of the greatest institution in America—the Press; that not a word he was going to say was going to be missed.

"And so, boys, as I intimated to you, the dragnet's out over Chicago tonight as it's never been before, and them that's holding it down for me ain't been let in yet on what I'm letting you in on. And every police wire in the United States is humming tonight, and if the actual capture isn't made by your deadlines, well I'll tell you just where you can get pictures of all the people involved. That is, all except the one man who wasn't of the same class as the others—the aristocrat, Mr. X, I call him. And you afternoon boys'll probably get him for your own exclusive stories."

The afternoon boys seemed at once automatically to brace up.

"All right, boys, I won't keep you on tenterhooks any longer. And just remember—as I talk—that that little innocent-looking red circle—or the date inside of it—is what give this whole thing that I'm giving to you, and if ever you saw anything that fitted like a jigsaw puzzle, you—but—wait, you haven't seen nothing yet. And first, before giving you the explanation of the methods used to work it out, I'll tell you everything that happened in that Jech shop last night!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

WHEN THE CITY SLEPT

TRULY, this was O'Toole's night of triumph. Perhaps he saw himself Commissioner of Police on that day several months hence when four persons should writhe to death under 2200 volts of current in the Cook county electric chair. Perhaps he saw himself only as chief of the detective bureau which was always in the throes of some sort of shake-up. For it had frequently been said that the precincts of the Thirty-Fifth District police station, presenting as they did a stage for such multifarious activities as narcotics and vice, to gambling and crime, made that station the actual stepping stone for ambitious sleuths to head of the detective bureau a mile to the north.

But whatever were the nature of the ambitions that O'Toole saw himself already realizing, he now began, more slowly, obviously correlating his facts as he went, and gazing with apparent abstraction from face to face as he made invisible marks on the table top with his unlighted cigar.

"Sometime last night, boys, between midnight—could have been as early as midnight yes—but wasn't later than one-thirty o'clock—when the city over on this part of the South Side was still a bit lively, a man carrying a suitcase or a bag went up the dark alley under the L at 22nd Street, turning in either off of 22nd Street or walking up the alley from 21st Street. When he got to the low wooden fence that cut off the back yard of Jech's place, he vaulted over it and came into that back yard. I'll tell you a good deal about this man in a minute. For th' present I'll merely inform you that he wasn't a cracksman. But he was after something. And he got what he was after too!" O'Toole paused. "But I'm getting ahead of my story.

"This fellow wasn't no husky brute. Mr. X— for I've got to temporarily call this fellow Mr. X—" He raised an admonitory forefinger. "No—don't get discouraged! You afternoon papers'll have Mr. X complete, where all you morning papers can do is to play him up as the mystery man. For he's sewed up completely, I tell you. I honestly look for him to commit suicide when the full details of this story break in tomorrow morning's papers. If he don't, he's just handing himself to the state's attorney for deposit in the electric chair." O'Toole paused. "Well, as I said, this fellow Mr. X wasn't a professional cracksman. He was a student or collector—had been for years. Kind of a man who takes his pleasures indoors—no golf—no nothing—just bugs on indoor things. A gentleman. Knew all about Jech—that the latter was deaf; knew the whole ins and outs of Jech's store. Knew the old safe whose only bulwark against a good smash in its lock mechanism was a steel plate held on by four rivets, and not fitting none too good at that either.

"This amateur—yes, he was an amateur—had a suitcase or kit with him, with a bunch of junk that he thought he could get into that safe with. You can imagine the layout he had. Home-made jimmy—probably a water-heater poker bent and flattened. Some hammers. A chisel or two. Maybe a sewing machine screw-driver, for all I know. God knows what he had collected together. But he had no soup—for he didn't have any inkling of that line of work.

"He—X—stood for a few seconds at the back window, figuring whether to jimmy it. He heard the glass rattle as an L-train passed, above him and to the back of him, and decided that with a deaf man such refinements of technique —even with an amateur—weren't necessary. So he just waited till two trains went by in opposite directions up above. In the roar and rattle, he placed his foot against the

glass, pushed, and the whole thing went in. And he stepped through, over the low sill, inside.

"He went on through the dark little junk room and into the office. I doubt whether he even had an electric torch—probably used a single match. He went over and snapped on the light in the vertical brass floor lamp that ultimately was used for the job the whole evening—by himself and by those who come after. If that lamp had been fitted with an ordinary finger snap-switch we would probably have had a wonderful print of this fellow's thumb on one side of it and his index finger on the other, for the outfit from this station who found conditions after the killing were careful not to mess things by touching. But unfortunately the lamp had a chain fixture from which the chain had broken off sometime in the past and a piece of string tied on. And you can't leave a fingerprint on a piece of string. However, no matter. We got it elsewhere!"

The newspapermen were giving the perfect attention of utter silence. The chief of the Thirty-Fifth District station went on.

"Well, this bird stood there, with his kit or suitcase full of home-made tools, studying the safe and getting ready to work. He knew Jech was deaf, and he knew that there was a steam stone-chipper operating down below ground up at the corner that jarred the neighborhood every time it bit into the stone sub-structure. In fact, he was a Chicagoan, and he'd read all about the local trouble around here and the suits threatened against the subway builders. And closing the door in the front wooden partition so that his operations on the safe and his movements wouldn't be visible on the street, he threw back the lid of his suitcase, or the jaws of his bag, and took out the first thing that he was going to require." O'Toole paused. "He took out an auto jack, new and specially procured for this occasion, and stood it up against the wall on the wall-side of the safe till he got ready to use it there in a certain manner.

Then, opening up a good jackknife in his pocket, he stepped into that back junk room and jerked up the top dog blanket of the dog bed that some old dog of Jech's had slept his life out on, more than a year ago. Taking it in—well, you fellows know what we found—he held one foot on the blanket and cut downward with the sharp knife till he converted it into strips of heavy felt about a foot wide. Then, still using one foot, he cross-cut the strips into squares. It was his intention, of course, to jack up the safe momentarily at each side, and deposit 10 of his 40 squares under each leg and let it down again, so that he could begin with the more violent work. He was quite protected, through Jech's deafness, from being heard. And this way he was protected against being 'felt,' by diminishing the force that could be sensed from his hammering and whatnot, so that even Jech, asleep upstairs, if he half woke up and turned over in his sleep, could only realize that the steam-chipper, preparing the foundations for the 22nd Street subway ascension, was pounding away at the rock that comprises the under-stratum of this whole district."

O'Toole now lighted his black cigar for the first time. It was plain he was enjoying the rapt attention he was receiving and the scratch of pencils and fountain pens.

"All this took him, boys—well—you can fix your own figures. How long does it take a man to cut 40 squares out of a blanket with a sharp pocket knife such as any of us carry? Call it fifteen minutes, if you want to. Call it a half-hour. It doesn't matter. For it's what was going on in the meantime that matters most of all. And what *was* going on in the meantime anyway?" He tossed his match across the room into a brass cuspidor. "Well, a mob of two workers arrived at the same spot in the L-alley, and clambored over the same low fence that the first fellow—the aristocrat—the amateur—did. The man was a professional peterman, the girl a peterman's moll. Although in calling that a mob of two workers, however, I ought to come right out defi-

nitely and tell you it was a mob of three—but one was purposely kept out on 22nd Street at a point I'll describe later, across the street from the store—as a lookout. So getting back to the first two members of this mob, the man was tall, his black hair prematurely shot with grey. He wore gold-rimmed spectacles, and had a brown mole on his cheek as big as a nickel; his eyes were brown, and he had gold bridgework on his upper teeth that showed whenever he drew his lips taut. He was a big powerful fellow—weighed about 200 pounds. The girl with him, while she was about 22 or 23 years of age, was a little lightweight with yellow hair—genuine yellow hair, incidentally, and not peroxide—with a madonna-like face, baby blue eyes, and weighed not an ounce over sixty pounds. About four-foot ten in height—but nicely formed in proportion to her smallness of body. She was a bad-egg type—you've seen her kind—they'll tackle you on the street with a madonna-like face and some sob story about a sick sister upstairs, and when you go up to investigate you'll probably get rolled for all you got by a confederate." O'Toole paused. "Incidentally, the two of 'em had donned rubber gloves when the man swung her over the fence and followed, and they had these gloves on last night during everything that transpired in that place. They—"

"Aw say, Chief," broke in a red-haired, freckled reporter in the front row of the quadrangle of chairs, "you're spoofing us, aintcha? You don't mean to sit there and try to tell this gang that from that little red circle you got such things as a mole as big as a nickel on this guy's face, and a flusie weighing sixty pounds? An' rubber gloves, and gold bridgework? Come clean, Chief. Come clean!"

"I said I did," put in O'Toole quite imperturbably, evidently valuing this critical comment very highly. "That little red grease-pencil circle gave me exactly what I'm giving you. Moreover, if you want to add something to your notes, Hexman, just write down in 'em that this part of

the mob only needed three rubber gloves for the simple reason that this big black and grey-haired fellow of 50 or so, with his 200 pounds, etc., had only one hand."

"I give up," said the redhead hastily. "Shoot, Chief."

"Well," said O'Toole pleasantly, blowing a nicely formed circle of smoke from under his mustache, "this mob had a small kit of tools that only the highest kind of professional petermen use. Tiny kit no bigger than a well-stuffed wallet —kind you can almost get into your breast pocket: it consisted of a glass cutter, a roll of putty to press against a pane, also wax to make a soup cup for a shot of dinny.. A few small polished steel wedges for wedging the safe door open a hair or two wider if needs be, while the dinny was seeping—and a toy rubber hot-water bottle of nitroglycerine hanging on a stout string around the man's neck. And when they flashed their powerful electric torch on that back yard window, they were much surprised to see that the glass had been stove in.

"Had somebody been there already that night and pulled a job? There was signs of light, not overly bright or brilliant, on the floor of the office where they knew the safe was. From its direction, it seemed like it must be a light stationed near the safe. They couldn't see that the door in the front partition had been drawn to, because the one window and the two doors aren't in line. As for the light, that didn't mean anything at all. It was a more common thing for shop owners to leave a light all night near their safe than not to. However—the glass stove in! It would be rather coincidental for them to arrive to start a job just after one had been finished. So, anyway, the big man, being the gamer of the two, draws his gat, steps over the low sill as the L is roaring above, and tiptoes as far as the door of the room used as an office. The girl, reassured by his gameness, and being a hardened little moll anyway, was at his very elbow. When they peer in, the big man's gat extended in front of him, they see a man just finishing the

cutting of 40 squares of woolen felt—a lone cracksman with a bag of tools standing near him.

"Now the newcomer with the one hand could size up character. This fellow near the safe was a gentleman, dressed like such and had all the earmarks of such. Tools or not, hour or not, he wasn't a peterman. And as the big man with the gold spectacles and the mole on his cheek also happened to know that Jech was quite deaf, he calmly spoke aloud:

" 'Put 'em up, brother. High. High!'

"The man working in the huge circle of light provided by the tall lamp jumped. He'd evidently been keeping watch by his ears rather than his eyes; perhaps he *was* keeping an occasional eye towards that door at the top of the flight where Jech lived, and hence wasn't dreaming of watching the other door in the rear partition through which he had come himself. And this attack from a quite different direction gave him some start. He thrust his own hands above his head, eyes a-popping. And the man with the gold-rimmed spectacles and the blonde moll came on in.

"The gold-rimmed newcomer motioned to the girl to frisk this bird. She did a smooth quick job, patting all his pockets, and she found nothing on him. He wasn't the kind to carry arms. 'All right, brother, you can let 'em down,' said the gold-rimmed man.

"There was a pause while the first man pulled down his arms and looked ruefully over at the auto jack he'd laid in readiness for use, and the squares of wool at his feet and his own bag on the floor a little back of him. The big man passed his gat over to the moll and came over and frisked the first man's vest pockets, taking out a number of papers and documents which he glanced over, riffling them with an index finger as a one-armed man does, and which he then put into his own breast pocket. 'And now, brother,' he said, 'what may you be doing here if I may ask?'

"'Looks like I'm here after something in that safe, doesn't it?' said the amateur.

"'It sure does,' said the man whose left wrist was only a stump bound with black cloth. He throws a hasty glance towards the safe referred to, and gives a slight start as though he had been slightly jolted. He returns his gaze to the amateur. 'It don't happen to be such-and-such an article by any chance, does it?' And he named an article which on the face of it would seem worth ten dollars at top-hole price.

"The amateur shook his head.

"'Well, what *were* you after?'

"The amateur realized he was dealing with a band of tough yeggs. 'What I'm after,' he said, 'is something that only a collector would want.' And he named an article of quite different nature than the gold-rimmed giant had suggested.

"That seemed to mollify the newcomer. He wasn't quite so hard-boiled in his attitude from that point on. 'And what's all that outfit for?' he said, pointing to the pile of felt squares.

"The amateur told him. 'I—I was going to jack the safe up, and cushion it; then go after the lock on it. Only way I know.' And he explained about the subway work, and waved a hand toward his jack.

"The big man stepped a few steps east of where he was standing, and gazed over to the point between the safe and the wall, to where the jack was plainly visible, waiting its use. Then he smiled sardonically, pityingly. He now looked at his watch. It was ten minutes of two. He nodded to the girl. 'Get over by that door in the front partition now, kid,' he directed, 'and watch through the crack for the all-well signals from our lighthouse. And in the meantime we'll show our collector friend some real technique.'

"The girl moved as by pre-arrangement to the door in the front partition; she opened it just a crack—enough so

that she could keep her eye directed through the store, the front windows, and across 22nd Street. And in that position she was also able to watch the door at the top of the flight of steps. And the big man proceeded to get to the business in hand.

"Right where he stands, he makes a few mechanical calculations of some sort," continued O'Toole, "and then walking over he studies the safe with a frown of perplexity covering his brow. This was the first close-up study he'd given it, and his frown gets deeper as he kneels down and runs a rubber-gloved index finger and a mighty keen eye around that safe door. For the first time he's become aware of something that was common knowledge in your noon papers today: the safe door was warped—warped so bad from some old fire, that there was gaps all around it. The gold-rimmed man can put his rubber-gloved finger right in at several of the points. An ordinary shot of nitro would have puffed out of those wide rifts just like gas. And a big enough shot to maintain terrific pressure even with those outlets would have blown the six walls of the safe in six directions, smashing everything inside to smithereens, and pulling down the walls of the house with it. Keen peterman that he was, experienced in many false and perfect shots, he saw that here was an an—an—an anomaly, boys—a safe that couldn't be successfully blown.

"Well, it was a complication he'd never dreamed of. I could tell you why—but I'll leave you to ask why later. He spoke in low moderate voice across the room to the girl.

" 'It's no go, kid. She's blow-proof, at least so far as getting what we want out of it unharmed. Tell you all about it later.

" 'Well,' she says promptly, 'our elderly boy friend over here's got an outfit that'll cut through that old can.'

"But already the big man had gone back to where the other fellow stood—Mr. X—the first man in the place. 'Well, brother,' he was saying, with a half smile that

showed all his gold bridgework on his upper teeth, 'you ain't so far from being hotsy-totsy as I thought you were. We got to use your way after all. Force! Let's see what sort of tools you brought with you, brother, and we'll all work this thing out together seeing we're connoisseurs on illegal abstraction, eh what?"

"For the first time in this affair," said O'Toole, "the amateur's face brightened up out of the disheartened look he'd been carrying. He opened his bag or suitcase with eager trembling fingers. The junk in there, screwdrivers, ice picks, punk chisels, and small hammer made the professional peterman give a snort of disgust. 'F'r crying out loud,' he said, 'you can't ever chop your way into that safe with junk like that.'

" 'Why can't I?' quavered the amateur. 'Look—that's a metal-cutting chisel I got there. And those rivets have got to be iron. Never heard of steel rivets.'

" 'No? Well did you ever hear anything about molecules —compressed iron, brother? Sure those rivets'r iron—but they've been compressed in holes from two sides while they're hot, and they're hard. You got to have a tempered edge tool. And you got to have a read sledge hammer—that thing you got is good for driving tacks maybe.' He mopped off his forehead. He looked toward the girl. "This is a hell of a note, kid. Now the question before the house is, have we time tonight to make some joint and come back before dawn with the proper layout? I wonder—'

"It was then," continued O'Toole, throwing away the stub of his cigar and lighting a new one, "that the gold-rimmed visitor remembered that as he flashed his light in the back window it fell on a huge tool chest right near the window; something that Jech owned; or possibly the amateur called it to his attention. I can't fill in the exact details of all conversation, boys—you understand that—but every main move or operation, including some mighty insignificant ones, that took place there I can prove to you

to the finest detail. But enough to say that they adjourned to the big tool chest in that back junk room and there they found what they needed, in conjunction with the first man's squares of wool which now weren't a bad idea at all; they found a decent, powerful sledge and a tempered cold chisel with an edge which, turning all the colors from red to green to purple, could eat its way through iron. Yes, boys, the tools were Jech's, as we happen to know now, and the undoubted use for which Jech got them was to chop away some iron rods which you'll find projecting up out of that cement and concrete back yard he laid out. Some, I find, have been chopped away; a few are still waiting to be cut."

O'Toole paused a moment to let fountain pens catch up with him. Then he went on.

"Well, the big man warned the other fellow away from actually touching things, and in his rubber-gloved hand gathered up the sledge, the tempered chisel and probably a rat-tail file whose ownership we can't substantiate because a file won't take fingerprints worth a whoop. Returning to the office, the peterman with the gold-rimmed glasses kneeled down and made a trial cut in one of the top rivet heads. 'It's soft enough iron,' he agreed, 'but compressed just like I told you. You'd have worn yourself out getting through it, even if you could-a got through it by morning with the junk you brought with you. Now we'll get into that can with a minimum of blows, and I figure twelve on each rivet can do the job. We'll have to play 'em regular and steady, just like this steam-chipper works.'

"I think," now put in O'Toole, "that I so much as told you boys that this mob had a lighthouse at a very unique vantage point outside. He—any questions?"

"Sure," said the redhead facetiously. "Was the lighthouse a little light man with sandy hair and blue eyes, with a limp, Chief?"

"No, he wasn't, Hexman. He was a heavy-set, muscular man, pockmarked and swarthy, with jet black hair and

glistening black eyes. Write that down in your notebook, old top."

A ripple of laughter ran around the group of newspapermen. It was plain that tonight was O'Toole's innings against crime and its dark veilings. No man ventured a further sally at this compendium of hard facts. A tension there was, waiting either his disclosure of what must have arisen out of the unusual situation in Jech's office, or else his revealment of the bases for his detailed knowledge.

"In fact," O'Toole went on, after the laughter had subsided, "I won't keep you guessing any longer about this third member of the mob. This lighthouse was a Mexican, and like every other low-class Mexican in the United States, he'd worked on section gangs, swinging a sledge and driving rail spikes. And that's why he got called later into that shop and made four people out of three.

"Yes," O'Toole acknowledged, "when they started to figure on chopping through those two rivets, they found themselves up against a problem. 'Twasn't the problem so much as to who should hold the chisel in place, because you boys can find out for yourselves that that steelplate is buckled far enough from the surface of the safe that you can just about stick a chisel between the two, and the pressure of the plate will hold it, particularly as it gets deeper in. That's why that ass of a Mackin from the bureau allowed himself all along to look on it as a one-man job. But that would-a been poor workmanship and clumsy. No, the thing to do was for one person to hold the chisel and one to swing the sledge. But assuming that any one of 'em could hold the chisel in place and keep it from slipping, who could swing the sledge? How about it, boys? I ask you?"

"Well, Chief," said one old veteran reporter with a vandyke beard, "if it's true that your peterman with the gold bridgework only had one hand, it's a cinch a one-armed man couldn't swing a heavy sledge."

"Nor a sixty pound girl," said a cub-like youth with baby face.

"And this amateur, Mr. 'X,' I've been telling you about," pronounced O'Toole, "was a weakling from the physical standpoint. He was the indoors type of man—student—kind that didn't do hard physical labor. Not only could he not swing a sledge, but if they were to do this job right and have one person actually hold the chisel in place, the girl—being a girl—wouldn't trust herself to hold the chisel he swung at, and the one-armed man wouldn't trust the only hand he had to a sledge wielded by a man who probably couldn't hit the chisel head. So the man with the gold-rimmed glasses inclines his head toward the outer street as a signal to the girl, standing at the crack in the front partition door, to give a signal with their pocket torch for this Mexican on the opposite side of 22nd Street to come across. Some sort of code agreed on—perhaps four flashes meaning 'All going well—but you're needed.'

"I'm going to tell you more about this Mex and his nook later, but for the present we'll just consider him in relation to this job. Here was the man to swing that sledge. Heavy set in build, strong, hard hitter, accurate with such a tool from years of work on railroad section gangs—why with that combination and the cold chisel held by anybody at all, that rivet'd be eat through in rapid order. And of course they'd use the pads the first man—Mr. X—had already cut; not a bad idea at all. As for the girl, she wouldn't be needed on this job when the Mex got here, and she could go across the street and do the work the latter had been doing.

"Well," O'Toole continued, "in about a quarter of a minute their pockmarked lighthouse comes around and through the window and in. He's been well trained by the main squeeze on the job and before he even comes inside, he's put on a pair of rubber gloves. Of course he's pretty

surprised to see a fourth member in the gang, and they have to explain to him that here's a fellow after something on his own hook. And they tell him that they need a fellow to swing that sledge. He picks it up—he's wearing his rubber gloves, so he's got nothing to fear—and hefts it with a few swings in the air to get the feel of it and be able to direct its impacts later. And as the big man motions him to come over and tip the safe with his shoulder—they don't need a jack now—and put the pads under, the whole four people get the shock of their life.

"It was Jech, boys. They'd been watching that stairs. But it so happens, my friends of the Press, that there's a trapdoor up in Jech's quarters completely covered with a small bath rug that's tacked down all around it—and overlapping. We happened to find it late today when we were still searching for that missing key to Jech's safe. It works on silent hinges, and leads to a ladder nailed to the wall of the store, in front of which hangs a ten or twelve foot Oriental runner. While it's true, like that ass of a Tom Mackin claims, that a man shot through the valve of the heart can run for twenty feet before he falls, we don't need his theory any longer that Jech was shot at the base of the steps, in view of this trapdoor and ladder. I say that had Jech appeared at the top of them steps, he'd either have had to halt where he was or he'd have been shot down at the very top step. No, my friends of the Press, Jech simply fooled 'em—he came down the ladder, pants and shirt and slippers on, letting the trapdoor settle into place as he descended. Something—a hunch—insomnia, maybe—alarmed him. He figured that some lone burglar was probably making a try at his safe. He had a gun in his hip pocket, and he just figured he'd catch this intruder dead to rights and plunk him through the back without warning. He tiptoed through the store and swung open that door. And I don't know who was most surprised—that mob—now really four people—that

was working there, each for his own purposes—or Jech himself when he found four people in that office when he expected one. And now don't look at me sarcastic-like, boys, when I tell you exactly what happened: just assume that I'll prove my assertion when the time comes.

"The amateur—Mr. X—was the nearest to that door, and he grabbed at Jech's gun to avert a killing of one or all—a general gun battle, in which everybody might have been drilled. Or perhaps, realizing the type of people he was working with, he did it only to save Jech's own life. It doesn't matter. For there'll be an aristocrat strapped in the electric chair with three professional crooks in a few months, and the public executioner pulling his switch. That's all that *does* matter." O'Toole paused. "So as I say, he flew at the gun and got hold of its barrel, shoving it into the air so that it couldn't even be fired. And at that moment the shot came from across the room that snuffed out Jech's life."

"Say, Chief," said the round-faced cub very trustingly at the one individual who knew all that had occurred, "our paper's running a big sob story on that Bohemian Society bequest. Playing up the widows and orphans that the Society looks out for—all that sort of stuff. You know? And you'll recall that if a man held the gun that killed Jech, they lose out on 30,000 bucks. And if a woman held it, some Evanston museum loses—"

"Yes,' put in O'Toole, "I know all about that. And you want to know whether the girl fired or the big man with the gold-rimmed glasses. Well for once in this story I'm stumped. All I know is that the big man's .38 was used. But I don't know whether he'd turned it over to her to hold so that he and the Mex could tip the safe an inch or so with their shoulders, or whether he drew it himself at this juncture from his hip pocket. I wish I could fill in the picture for you, gentlemen, because of your stories on that Bohemian Society bequest, and the women and kids

that gets the benefits if—and providing! But unfortunately I can't. Either the girl had the gun and fired in a fit of nerves—or the spectacled man called out to her to shoot quick, or else he drew and fired himself. But one shot—and Casimer Jech fell dead in the very doorway where he had come on this mob.

"Well, here was hell a-popping. The big gold-toothed man realized that murder had been done and it wasn't any longer the simple housebreaking job it had been. But he was a cool head. He was a master. He took charge at once. And being a master, I can tell you boys just what he said.

" 'We got to get out of here within five minutes,' he warned everybody, 'in case that shot was heard.' Then he turned and surveyed all hands with an all-seeing eye. Himself, the girl and the Mexican all wore rubber gloves, and had been wearing 'em since they come in. Now he gave a quick glance over the tools that had been used—or taken for use. The only things that had been handled by human fingers were the first intruder's auto jack, still lying in position between the safe and the wall, and Jech's gun which Mr. X had wildly grappled for. 'Kid,' the big man commanded to the girl, 'take that gat and stow it away.' To the others: 'Leave that sledge, file, and chisel.' He recalled, of course, as he called off these items, the jack. He addressed the first comer, pointing to the latter's kit. 'Get that jack you brought with you out and back into your kit,' he warned. 'And touch nothing on the way out—nothing, mind you. We—'

"But at this juncture," O'Toole went on, emphasizing his point with his forefinger, "somebody—it may have been the Mexican—caught sight of a leather thong around Jech's neck. Yes, boys, it was the key to the ancient safe. Which means that these birds actually did get, each, what he was after. For Jech has a sister-in-law who visited him frequently. I located her today, and she told me about a

little iron hook and a wooden ledge he had screwed onto the inner surface of the wooden side of his bed, where he placed that key every night. He always hung the key on the hook and laid the long leather thong on the ledge. We had hoped in the beginning that our solution to this case might lie in that safe—that we could inventory its contents and trace out from there—but lo and behold, we never even had a chance to get that key. For it was on Jech's neck when he came down. And they got it."

"Probably reading in bed, don't you think, Chief, and not even fully retired yet?" put in the tall, sallow, sad-faced reporter. "Of course I'm not trying to jimmy up any of your deductions, however."

"Don't apologize, Stearns," said O'Toole. "Your idea is a good one. It doesn't jimmy up things at all. It fits in perfectly." Which ungrudging compliment prophesied that O'Toole's revealments of his own deductions in this case would be far more acute than merely accounting for the retiring hours of a human being.

"In fact, boys," the local police head added, "you can fill out for yourselves what happened when the thing was discovered on Jech's neck, open at the throat. Mr. X was probably badly shaken—white-faced and trembling. The gold-rimmed man himself, being the boldest of the crowd, removed that thong, or else possibly delegated the Mexican to do it. It was the big man, however, who took it, put it hastily in the safe, felt for the tumblers, and swung open the door, for it happens that he was something of a lock expert. And with that he removed from it the thing he was after. He spoke fast now. And his words were in the direction of the white-faced Mr. X.

" 'And now you, brother—if this thing you're after is found in this safe by the coppers, does it contain a trail that might lead to you?'

"Mr. X nodded. 'It will,' was all he said.

"'Hm! Then we got to get it out too. All right,' he added, 'where's your object—hey—don't touch. Just show me.'

"Mr. X showed him a drawer or compartment or set of drawers.

"He opened one—or several—and getting X's assent, tossed the thing in question into the latter's open suitcase or bag. Then he locked the safe to delay police inspection of it, and pocketed the key. 'Everybody be ready in one minute to get out,' he commanded. 'Be ready to follow immediately when I whistle three times.' And .38 in hand he led the way towards the back for his workers.

"Yes," said O'Toole, "he led the way. Don't smile, boys, as though I'm romancing. Some day you'll appreciate real police work in this case which could tell you the exact order in which a mob of workers left a place. Yes, the gold-rimmed fellow led the way. He was outside in the yard, ready to fight for his mob, or to whistle if the coast was clear, some minute or so before the rest had followed. And of the three left, the Mex sped through the store and took a good look out at 22nd Street to see if there was any danger brewing in that direction, in case the back yard flight was cut off.

"That left the girl and Mr. X waiting in the office. She was a cool one, for I'll so much as tell you that she stopped to powder her nose and rouge her cheeks before passing out into the night when the signal should come. Maybe it was just feminine pride—or maybe it was self protection—a desire to put on plenty of paint and be able to pass as a home-going cabaret singer from the cabarets to the east, or even a streetwalker. I don't know why she did it. But she proved to be a typical woman after all, and that's that! Fifteen seconds later, the signal came, the Mex came racing through the store and all three piled out into the night.

"Now that, boys, is exactly what happened in that Jech

place between one-thirty and two-fifteen this morning. This mob, Mr. X included, hustled off, probably to some back alley where the peterman had a car parked, or to some flat or housekeeping rooms in this big jungle of a town where the peterman and his moll were living. And they put in a nervous night waiting for the morning papers. There wasn't so much in the first papers, however, and so they kept waiting till the noon ones. And then they got a jolt. For they read that the jack had been found. Maybe this fact came out between 'em in discussing the affair, long before the noon papers got on the street. I don't know. But when the fact did come out Mr. X must have caught hell for his oversight. But I'm so much as going to tell you that the damned fool wasn't so much to blame as the girl—it was her wanting to powder her nose that was the cause of that error. She—however, we'll go into that later. There never was a crime, you boys know as well as I, in which there wasn't a bad slip of some sort. And when they discovered the fact that the jack had been left behind, all covered with X's fingerprints, the big man probably took the blonde flyweight to one side and said to her: 'It's our move, kid. We better get out of town and get fast. If the cops should reach him, they'd have the full info on us: he's next to my one fin, and your corntossel, and the Mex's pockmarks.' And so, believing that it might be many days at most before us police could wind up at Mr. X's threshold, even if we ever could, they broke up as soon as night came down and gave 'em a cover. Mr. X went back home in Chicago; the Mex went out of town in one direction, and the big man and the girl probably made for some hangout in some other city—or maybe for a seaport. Little did they realize that long before the police would ever reach Mr. X, the long arm of the law would be reaching out for them."

O'Toole paused.

"And now, boys," he finished, "you have a half idea

that I've just smoked an opium pill or else I'm kidding you all when I tell you that this department—which happens to be myself, in this case—working solely on practical hard-headed police lines, has rebuilt this whole crime and almost every move that was made, out of a small red circle drawn about a certain date of the coming December on a calendar. And that's where you get your big feature story, see? Now what do you want to ask. Fire 'em fast, boys."

CHAPTER XXIX

"EASY ENOUGH WHEN YOU KNOW HOW IT'S DONE!"

THE big question was not long in coming. The round-faced cub with the plaid necktie, who had spoken before, propounded it.

"Well, Chief, I guess I'm not talking for my sheet only, or for myself, but for all the fellows here: but howinhell do you dope out the complete descriptions of this professional peterman and the moll that came in on this amateur X? And also, how do you know the general physical appearance of this Mr. X? And that he was the first guy in the place? And—"

"Extremely easy, son," said O'Toole. "And like all tricks of conjuring, it's too easy when you know how!" He paused. "So you're curious about the professional mob, eh? All right. We'll answer that first." He flicked off the ashes from his second cigar. "Well, the first thing I did when I got to thinking about the fact that Jech had marked off the 17th of next December on his calendar, even tearing off September, October, and November so's he wouldn't muff it, was to query myself as to what there was about a date like that so important that he didn't want to overlook it. Just what was he trying to watch—three, four months from now? Was it that he expected a visit perhaps from somebody? But when people are going to visit you only in three or four months, it means that they can't do it before. For that's too far ahead, for ordinary social or even business appointments. And if people can't visit you now, the only inference is that they're in jail or prison —and it won't be till then that they're going to be free.

"So I proceeded to get from the National Penal Record Bureau in the Monadnock Building a list of names of all

crooks whose sentences technically expire all over the United States on the coming 17th of December. The list, as you boys possibly know, is compiled from the conviction records of the American criminal courts plus the entry records of the different penitentiaries, and is available to all police workers, judges, court attaches and social workers for a fee corresponding to about a proportional part of the cost of keeping the list compiled.

"Such a list, quite naturally, carries a man's name under two dates: the date on which he walks out of the pen if he fills his complete sentence, and the date that he walks out if he leaves subject to the good behavior allowance which varies in different states.

"As you can imagine," O'Toole went on, "the daily discharges on a list like that vary tremendously. One day in the year it may be possible for society to have a hundred crooks disgorged back onto it; another day may have possibilities for only three. Well, the 17th of December was a moderate one: there were 18 people who could walk out on that day, composed of convicts who had served their full time, and convicts who would have received the good behavior allowance of their state.

"The names of these 18 crooks naturally included a lot I'd never heard of, and some that I had, the latter being such as Fedink Fat Barber, Omaha Shorty Barret the Bindle Bum, the notorious Harry Tollefson, and Gentleman Dan Kremer.

"In the meantime the coroner returned me the bullet that killed Jech, and before sending it down to the detective bureau as I'm compelled to do, I promptly sent it over to Wendell Melley, probably the foremost ballistics and arms expert in Chicago. On the face of it it looked like a plain .38, but there's lots of differences even in .38 lead slugs that an expert can read, and I particularly wanted Melley to give me a detailed report from the

rifling of it as to what kind of a shooting iron it might have come out of.

"Well, the report came back quick. Among other details was one most significant: that ball had been shot by a .38 gun that had been rifled in a reverse direction from the customary rifling on small arms. We—" O'Toole now reached into his hip pocket and withdrawing a badly battered revolver, perhaps taken at some former day from some criminal, he opened a drawer of the squat desk and took out something evidently prepared specially for this talk: a pair of long slender white wax cylinders, several inches in length. Laying one on the table he inserted the other in the black orifice of the gun muzzle and turned it slowly; as he did so, it drew itself in like a screw, slivers of wax crawling out the orifice. He then withdrew it with an unscrewing motion, and holding it up, it showed by the bright light from the overhanging bulbs, at least to those near the front, that into its surface had been cut a series of fine wavy convolutions. "This is an ordinary gun rifled as all guns are," O'Toole explained. "Don't be afraid, boys, that I'm going to shoot any of you accidentally; the barrel has been smashed and the thing's been out of commission for two years. All right. Now since I've turned this .39½ taper in this muzzle in the regulation way for getting an imprint of the rifling of that muzzle, I've got what I went after."

He now took up the other taper, and thrusting it in the muzzle turned it slowly in the opposite way. It refused to be drawn in like the first, only spewing a few shreds of white wax at first and then stopping even that. "If I try to screw this .39½ taper into the gun," O'Toole continued, "in the wrong direction—or—and this is important, boys—to screw it in in the right direction in a gun that might happen to have a reverse rifling, it balks; and the only way I could get an imprint of the rifling then would

be to reverse my twist. All right." He laid the two demonstration tapers on the side of his desk, and tossed the gun into a drawer. He went on talking.

"Now, as I told you, the bullet that killed Jech showed that it came out of a gun that had a reversed rifling. And we know something about reverse rifling only because we know something about crooks. We know that such a thing isn't sold; isn't made. We know, also, that 'Superstitious Sam' Sonnenschein, a crook who has the trade of gunsmith, and who worked for the International Arms Company of Winchester, N. H., was the man who originally conceived a number of peculiar crook's superstitions—one of which was that a gun with reverse rifling was sure luck to its owner. The fellow was a peculiar nut in many ways, and this was just one of many bugs he had in his bean. We know that he made six of these revolvers with a special tap of his own, and passed five of 'em out to his friends without telling 'em anything about the special design of the rifling inside the muzzle. Wanted to substantiate his own nut idea by watching the careers of his five friends. Well, to cut a long story short, Sam's own gun was later taken away from him by the Buffalo police and confiscated. He tried so hard to replevin that simple little shooting iron that they took him up again, and beat the real reason out of him. They got the whole story in that third degree—about his nut idea, and the fact that he'd made five more of those guns; and the names of those five crooks they went to were gotten on the Buffalo police records for that happy—or unhappy—day someday that some shooting affair would be committed with a reversed rifled revolver.

"Now the names of these five crooks who are today either proud possessors of a gun with a freak rifling, or who have such shooting iron stashed away somewhere in their outfit, and none of whom know anything about it simply because the Buffalo police promptly deported 'Su-

perstitious Sam' Sonnenschein back to Hungary where he came from—Hungarian Jew, you see—happen to contain, among many, one Stage Door Dunn, Billy the Goat, and Gentleman Dan Kremer. Ah—I see your faces light up, boys. You've perceived already that the mathematical line representing the 18 men who could walk out of the pen on December 17th next, crosses a new mathematical line comprising the five men who received reversed rifled rods from 'Superstitious Sam' Sonnenschein. Yes, and it crosses the new line at one point only: Gentleman Dan Kremer, who lies in both. And he's the only common factor in both lines and the only place where they conceivably can cross.

"I'm pretty calloused to surprises in my game, boys, but I'll admit my heart was in my mouth at this juncture, lest that perfect crossing—a weird coincidence, at best—be nullified by some factor. So I hurried on with my investigations to see whether everything would hold up. I wired the Massachusetts penitentiary to check up on Gentleman Dan Kremer. And I sure got all I was looking for—and some! Kremer, it seems, had drawn only a year conviction because his case was a bit muddled and the jurymen got bewildered. Although he indisputably was guilty, there were flaws in the prosecution. And his lawyer had gotten his case remanded to the Supreme Court after Dan had begun to serve his actual year. And Gentleman Dan was out on appeal—got out three days ago, in fact.

"Think of that, boys. Jech was killed with a bullet from a gun of a type that only five men in America could have had. And Gentleman Dan was one of that five. Jech had been anxiously watching for the arrival of the 17th of December. He feared somebody who from that date on would be a disturbing factor in his, Jech's, affairs. Jech was either going to have a bodyguard after that date, or perhaps run home to Bohemia on a nice vacation. Who knows? All we know is that Gentleman Dan was to get back to the world on that date. But Gentleman Dan was out

three days ago on a technicality—which Jech couldn't know. Why—I didn't even know it myself!

"In a flash the whole case flew together, boys, like a jigsaw puzzle when you get it started. For Gentleman Dan Kremer is a highly skilled cracksman. His last two convictions have been materially aided by fingerprint evidence. Also, incidentally, because of his knowledge of technical processes, acids, etching, photography, etc., he was employed in the Massachusetts pen in the laboratory where they record and fingerprint newcomers. So much for that. He was sent up for the robbery of the vault of the Mexican consulate in Boston, in which a big bunch of ancient objects of religious art, sent up to Boston temporarily by the Church of Mexico pending the latest Mexican troubles against the priests, was stored: it consisted of old laces, ivories, old candle-sticks, religious dewdads of gold or silver. It's known the crooks fled west, for Gentleman Dan was extradited from Chicago.

"Again you get even a further tie-up, boys, for Jech was a dealer in curios, objects of art and relics. Outside of the most of the gold and silver, which they undoubtedly melted up, these crooks wouldn't have had an outlet for that stuff through an ordinary fence—wouldn't have had any outlet except through curio dealers who could perceive the artistic or historical value. That Gentleman Dan had dealings also with Jech I can give you clear-cut proof too, now that I've substantiated all these other points. For here's a copy of Jech's last income tax statement that I got before noon today—these things are always good to study in all kinds of mysteries, boys—" O'Toole tossed a paper over to the man in the front seat, who glanced hurriedly over it under the battery of lights above, and passed it on to the next man. O'Toole went on after a second or so. "Jech, you'll note, asks $100 off for depreciation from mildew of some old Mexican lace. Mildew, eh?" The Thirty-Fifth District police head ruminated,

chewing his cigar but smiling. "Something he didn't hang in the sunlight of his window lest some wise policeman with a knowledge of Mexican lace spotted it? Something kept only in the safe—in the dark?

"Well, what other dealings did Jech have with Gentleman Dan when he bought a good stock or maybe all of the cracksman's stolen art and religious stuff? In particular, what was the peculiar transaction in which Gentleman Dan got gypped so bad that Jech expected him to come back pronto and with blood in his eye when he got out of the pen? I'll tell you, boys. It was the sale by one, and the purchase by the other, of a little silver flat dish handcarved and scratched up with certain secret markings and Latin words, with a base underneath, and a handle on the side—a dish supposed to hold oil and a wick—the kind the foolish and wise virgins in the Bible—the ones you've heard of when you went to Sunday school ages ago—used as lamps for their oil. A 'vestal lamp' this was known as to the curio trade; and this particular one was of a shape and type fixing it as of a period known as 50 B.C. to 50 A.D."

"I say, Chief," broke in the reporter with the vandyke beard, "wasn't there a story in the papers not long ago about a church down in Mexico—the Chapel de St. Sebastien or something like that!—owning the original lamp that belonged to the Virgin Mary herself? And about it being lost in an American safe robbery? And—"

"There was," said O'Toole dryly. "And this was the lamp! For during those last riots when Mexico got all unsettled, this little church sent its one relic for safekeeping to the Cathedral of the City of Mexico; and the Cathedral, when things got worse, sent all their things, including this, up to the Mexican consulate in Boston, representing a government that was favorable to 'em. Now the church probably knows its own business, and if it feels it's got a perfect record from them Latin inscriptions

written or scratched in the silver, proving the authenticity o' that lamp clear back to Mary herself—well then probably it's the genuine thing. I don't know, excepting as I'd say a thing like that'd be mighty precious to the chapel that owned it. But I do know that it was only a few days or a week after Gentleman Dan went to the pen that the story broke about this Virgin Mary's lamp being part of that Boston loot—this lamp that was nearly priceless to the church—but worth merely fifty dollars at best to a curio collector, as a 50 B.C.-50 A.D. 'vestal lamp,' and worth six dollars or so as bulk silver. Gentleman Dan knew that only crookdom, with its powerful intricate organization, could successfully negotiate that religious relic back to the church and pluck a young fortune—maybe $50,000—maybe $100,000—for it. He knew from his dealings with Jech that the latter was an agnostic and even an atheist; that Jech'd never give it back to the church free gratis; and Gentleman Dan knew that Jech couldn't sell it back to the church because it was stolen property. He knew Jech couldn't negotiate it because he didn't have the underworld organization. And he knew that Jech, now learning the facts about the lamp, would never sell it to an ordinary collector of medieval curios as an ordinary vestal lamp. And so Gentleman Dan, quite penniless, and quite furious with himself for parting for fifteen or twenty dollars with what he thought was an ordinary Catholic altar ornament of bulk silver, and now suspecting that Jech had sensed all along that it held real value—maybe, from the Latin on it, historical value, too!—decided to neatly steal it back, for that one article was worth fifty times the value of the whole lot of Boston loot put together.

"Now that a lot of this end of the crime is clearing up for you, and holding together perfectly, you're beginning to wonder how I know the general description of the

amateur who came in first—how I know he was an amateur —how I even know he was there first. And about those other people in Gentleman Dan's mob. All right. And if I can substantiate for you boys the existence of this sixty-pound yellow-headed girl who couldn't swing a sledge, and this Mexican track laborer, you'll begin to see a lot of my reasoning as to what went on in that shop—but not all of my reasoning.

"As to the fly-weight girl. Corn-Tossel Annie is and was this Gentleman Dan's moll. That's known on police records. For that reason we might logically suspect she was in this job helping him, because he's only got one fin—he lost his other years ago in a safe robbery in Montreal—but we also know she was there from other indications I'll present to you in a few minutes. But about this Mex. It happens, boys, that there's been a hot-dog stand for some months across the street from Jech's place, built in a narrow passageway between two buildings, roofed-in and all. That hot-dog stand moved out two days before this Jech murder, for the simple reason that the owner was offered a few more dollars a month by a gypsy woman with a pockmarked face, for a joint to tell fortunes and read heads in. She got a month-to-month lease, and put up her banners—you boys know the kind—reading 'Gypsy Fortune Queen—Phrenology'—all that stuff. She's been in and out of that place at all hours. That is—up to the time of this murder; nobody's seen her since. She claims to have a family—sick child and all that—over on Blue Island Avenue where most of the gypsies live. But, boys, the porter in the Mexican consulate offices at Boston who tipped Gentleman Dan off to the fact that all this valuable stuff had arrived from Mexico, was a Mexican named Chihuahua Joe Gonzalez. He never went to trial because he faded out. He was pockmarked. He was an ex-section gang laborer. Now there's your pockmarked gypsy woman!

There's the vantage point where Gentleman Dan, master workman and mob master, put his lighthouse. There's the man who was called in to swing the sledge.

"Now with the Mex established, I see you're all busting with a question or two. It's Mr. X you're interested in now, ain't it? And maybe you'd like to have Corn-Tossel Annie's presence corroborated a bit. All right. Let's see how we know further that little blonde she-cat was in the place." O'Toole swung open the door of the cabinet at the bottom of his desk and brought out a mirror perhaps a foot and a half high and a foot wide, with slightly rounded corners and with a brassy hammered frame in which peculiar undulating curves seemed to constitute the chief artistic motif. He held it up. "See this framed mirror, boys? Been hanging so long on its nail that the picture wire across the back has rusted to the nail." O'Toole turned it around. The assemblage could see how the picture wire had sagged into a small half-loop, and that this half loop was the only stretch where rust and corrosion had formed. "But I didn't find this mirror on its nail," O'Toole went on calmly. "I found the nail—yes—in Jech's office above his radiator, and high enough up so that only a mighty tall man could have looked in that mirror, and where a four-foot ten woman could never have lifted it down. The mirror stood on the top of that radiator, several feet below the nail, and tilted against the wall. Why was it lifted down off its nail and stood up on that lower level? I'll tell you why—I've already told you. It means a woman was there, boys, a woman of four-foot ten which is Corn-Tossel Annie's height in the official police records. A woman who has to stick powder and rouge on her snoot if it's the last thing she ever does.

"But who lifted it down at her request? Gentleman Dan? No, boys, for the poor fool who did it didn't wear rubber gloves, and if Gentleman Dan had been in the room when Corn-Tossel asked to have the mirror lifted down

to her, and the object of her request went to use his bare hands, Dan would have stopped that pronto. That's how I deduce it was a last minute affair—that it happened just before the final flight; that Gentleman Dan must have been out in the back yard, that the Mex was probably up front looking out on 22nd Street—for even he'd have spotted this bad play and called the turn. For one fresh oily thumbprint was on the lower left corner of the glass, boys. None o' the Thirty-Fifth District police station men that entered the Jech shop early this morning touched a thing without rubber police gloves on. And I had a certified photograph and enlargement of that single thumbprint made for me at noon today. It contains a rare pattern—or combination—it's what's known as a double-delta with both deltas cut by a short scar. Easy to make a formula from. And only one formula possible, too! Well, it isn't Chihuahua Joe's, for he's been mugged and his Bertillon is available to me. It isn't Gentleman Dan's. His are available. And it isn't Corn-Tossel Annie's. Hers are available. Indeed, its formula isn't any of the half-million formulæ all recorded at the National Bureau of Dactylographic and Police Records at Columbus, Ohio, for I wired it to 'em and got a report. That indicates only too well that it's some newcomer—in other words, an amateur.

"Now let's see what basis we got for dividing this Jech murder into three stages—an amateur stage—a professional stage—then a combination or cooperation between the actors in each. If we can do that, we'll see how the movements I've outlined check perfectly. Let's consider the four tools found at that crime: the auto jack, the file, the sledge and the chisel. Now the jack was literally peppered with fresh fingerprints. Creel's assistant down at the bureau is a friend of mine and I've been able to get all the info on this stuff. As you know, in all crimes we take fingerprints of the dead person first for elimination purposes. Well, the fingerprints smeared over that jack

ain't Jech's at all. Not one of 'em. That means it was brought there, and it was made use of—or contemplated for use—in a rankly amateur manner. Likewise, the remaining tools were apparently negative as to use by the crooks—for they carried only Jech's prints—which shows first that the people who did use 'em didn't anticipate having to do a chopping job, and had to make the best of a peculiar situation. Also it means that between the times when these two sets of tools were laid out, the first tool and the last three, a master hand came on the scene with a technique involving the wearing of rubber gloves by every person in his mob. Such a man is Gentleman Dan who's got good reason for being leary of fingerprints seeing as his own convictions have been aided twice by such evidence, and also because he's worked in the tricky little things in the prison lab at Massachusetts pen and knows now what they can do to a man's liberty. How did I know he brought a little kit no bigger than a vest pocket wallet? How did I know that he gave a start when he first went over and looked at that safe, as I described to you a while back? I know this because at the time he must have dealt with Jech, Jech had an honest-to-God spherical chilled-surface safe of 1880—a curio in itself, which I find he sold to the American Safe Company to make a museum window display which you can see yourself on Lake Street if you want to. And Jech had picked up this old sardine box somewhere—this Banker's safe of the 60's. No drilling would have been of any avail on that original spherical chilled safe of 1880. No chopping. Nitro would have had to be used. And Gentleman Dan wouldn't have brought either chopping tools or even drills.

"Thus we see why Dan's mob had to fall back on the same methods as the amateur—considering the sardine can was full of potential gas blow-holes. And he—but I see by your faces you're still puzzled by my deductions about this amateur. Well, boys, I get 'em from that jack."

O'Toole paused a bare second.

"For twenty years, men, I've been examining the kits and toolboxes of captured cracksmen and burglars; and some left behind in flight. In twenty years I tell you that I've never come across such a fool contraption as that. Why, boys, you don't have to jack up a safe of the size such as Jech had to get pads under the feet. Take even a piano as an example—and try this yourself. It requires four husky men to carry one upstairs. But anyone of you can tilt the thing with one hand, enough so as even to slip castors in it. No sir, this fellow 'X' not only didn't know safes as a cracksman knows 'em, who realizes that a jimmy, or a sledge, or even a chair, thrust under any safe and used as a lever will tilt it a bit, or better, a husky shoulder against it and feet braced against the floor, will do it; but he wasn't of the mechanical turn of mind that realizes that the distance between any pair of feet of the safe and the opposite top edge is a powerful lever that can be used to tip the center of gravity, lying about the middle of a steel box, around the two feet constituting the point of support. That means he never did construction work or even common labor in his life. Why hasn't it occurred to anybody, particularly Tom Mackin of the bureau, that the jack's the real proof and the only proof that one man came to do that job all alone; to which I'll add that the jack is further psychological proof that this lone visitor was a man who realized his own lack of physical strength in conjunction with a lifting or tilting job; a man whose physical weakness was a dominant thought in his own sub-conscious mind if not in his conscious one? And there we get his picture. Student; probably well past the prime o' youth with youth's over-estimate of its own strength; collector, looking for something in a curio dealer's safe, gentleman, maybe; aristocrat perhaps; but never a mechanic, nor a workman nor a professional at all. Sufficiently of an amateur, too, that his own tools were

as inadequate as his knowledge of mechanics; so that the professional mob that came later had to fall back on Jech's own toolbox."

O'Toole paused. He threw away the stub of his second cigar. Then he spoke.

"Now I've outlined this case to your minds as perfect as I can so far's the main structure and main events go. But maybe now you'll want to ask a few questions about the finer points. So I'll be the audience and you boys do the talking."

The newspapermen as one man looked up from their notes. Several brows were lost in thought. Then the red-haired, freckled-faced Hexman spoke. "Chief, I'll tell the world you've done a piece of work that's going to put you in as head of the bureau downtown, or this bunch misses its guess. And don't forget us boys when you land in the throne." He paused. "There's only an insignificant point or so as far as I'm concerned, Chief. Seems to me you've got the thing from A to Izzard all right. I'd like to ask just one question: what makes you so certain that, outa four people, the amateur 'X' was the one who flew at Jech's gun when Jech came in—assuming Jech had a gun?"

"More than easy," grunted O'Toole, but smilingly. "Jech wouldn't have come in on 'em without a gun—be sure of that; and he did have one, for the drugstore man from 22nd and State saw it one day when he was in there recently; and the gun was taken. Now Gentleman Dan would never have encumbered that mob with further execution evidence than was already on 'em in the matter of the objects they went after—for, after all, these objects couldn't be identified in any court as actually belonging to Jech. But Jech's own gun—identifiable! That was another thing. Dan would have seen to it that it be left. But the fact that he took it shows only one thing: it got fingerprinted. But since the regular mob had rubber gloves on—

all of 'em—it means that the amateur positively was the one who fingerprinted it. Which means that he grabbed for it when Jech appeared on the scene."

"I getcha, Chief," said the red-head. "Good reasoning. Good reasoning, all right." He turned back of him and grinned at a couple of men in the second row of chairs. "Jeez, but you afternoon boys are sitting pretty and you don't know it. The identity of 'X' is the big story I'll say. And you'll get it!"

"Somebody'll get it," commented O'Toole patiently, "for even if Dan and his henchmen never were picked up, we'll work for months, if needs be, getting the fingerprints of every collector in the Chicago area till we get the prints that tally with them on that jack."

"Tracing up purchases of jacks too, aren't you, Chief?" asked the reporter with the soiled collar.

"Sure. But that isn't one-two-three in comparison with what we can do through the prints on it. Yes, every patrolman in Chicago today is inquiring at hardware and auto-parts stores for descriptions of any purchasers of articles like that."

"I'd like to ask a question, Chief," put in the tall sallow-faced fellow who mayhap in a few months would be viewing the death march that would put the very subjects under discussion in the 2200-volt chair. "Were you just romancing a bit when you described how Dan, after his moll had fanned this bird 'X' for a rod, went across the room, frisked him, took his wallet, glanced at his papers and pocketed the whole works?"

"Not at all, Stearns," promptly replied O'Toole. "For you see I happen to know something of Dan's personal psychology and technique in this game he plays. He—" The Thirty-Fifth District head reached in the drawer of his desk. "I have here a transcript, taken over the long distance phone today by my stenographer, of a letter Dan wrote while in prison. It was dictated or read to her, over

the wire, by the stenographer at the Massachusetts pen. It seems that when Dan was brought down to the penitentiary office at the time the official news came in there that the Supreme Court had remanded his case over for a new trial, he was released there and then without being sent back to his cell, his bond being still in force. And under his mattress, the new man they moved into his cell found this letter which Dan had been writing, and which he had probably figured on smuggling out by some visitor. This letter," O'Toole went on, gazing about him, "appears to have been directed at some new protegé of Dan's, some kid that he knew, one Kid Dutch Galloway, and contains a lot of rules he was laying down for this Dutch to follow in the game of crime. We won't bother to read 'em all, but let's read rule seven as he wrote it for Kid Dutch." The police head cocked one eye down, and read aloud, while fountain pens jumped hippity-skip over paper.

> " 'No. 7. When working with anything from a high-class box mob after a load of junk down to a cheap cannon mob skinning the shorts, never play in as long as there's a geezer—or even a twist—on the job who you don't know. He—or she—may look Annie Oakley, but when—and if—you're glaumed this geezer or twist may pop up in your trial as a dick or helper from The Office, and you may find yourself ditched for fifteen flat—and on a bum beef at that! Make a playful riffle of him for his poke—if he's square he'll stand for it—if he's Mr. Richard he'll try to ditch his leather or duck, and maybe even make it on the sock-and-clout.'

"Which translated," said O'Toole dryly, looking up, "means as follows: 'Whenever working on any job from a high-class safe robbing expedition after a big lot of jewelry, down to just a gang of pickpockets working the streetcars, never work with the job if there's a fellow—or even a girl—whose identity isn't known to you. He or she may look O.K. to you, but when—and if—you're taken up on arrest, this fellow or girl may appear in your trial as a detective or a state's attorney's worker and you may find yourself sent up for a fifteen-year sentence—and on

a false charge at that! Make a playful play at him for his wallet which will probably contain identification cards or papers—if he's a square crook he'll stand for any examination—but if he's a detective he'll try to drop or hide his pocketbook, or fade away quick, or maybe even slug his way to the clear.' "

O'Toole looked up from his paper. "With Dan laying down rules like that for a newcomer, don't you fellows believe that when he found a man working away in that joint this morning, he figured maybe it was a plant—maybe the state had some inkling he might have this place as an objective, and were trying to get water-tight evidence against him? It was just a possibility, but don't you think it was a certainty that Dan would have gone over and 'riffled the fellow for his poke?' And of course, this amateur no doubt had some sort of papers and personal letters on him—we all have—that showed he was just a nut collector trying to pull a lone job of his own."

"Why do you figure," asked the round-faced cub, "that this fellow 'X' didn't get a shot in the back before they all piled out of there? He was a danger-point for Dan, so far's I can see; for if he got pinched and cracked under the third degree, he would be in a position to spill that the other three in on the job were a man with one fin, a yellow-headed jane, and a pockmarked Mex."

"Well," said O'Toole pleasantly, "maybe the best way I can answer that question is to read you another one of Dan's passages to his young friend Kid Dutch. Let's see what he writes here in rule No. 9—the last one." He read aloud:

"'No. 9: 2 and 2's collected by this lone hustler through casing the court convictions over 20 years shows that in 81 percent of acquittals there's always one hustler that's well heeled with scratch, and conversely 76½ percent of convictions shows a mob without a cent of coin back of anybody or maybe a lone hustler with nothing but his front to his back. And why am I handing you this fakealoo? Because, Kid, always work in a mob where there's one

geezer handsome-heeled; in catching the best mouthpiece money can buy he has an 81 percent chance for a kiss-off from the jury. Then you'll catch his kiss-off at the same time. 2 and 2's, boy, are never a shill.' "

O'Toole looked up. The faces of even the newspapermen were blank. "It means, boys, translated: 'Statistics collected by this individual crook by watching and tabulating available court convictions over 20 years show that in 81 percent of acquittals there's always one crook that's well supplied with money, and conversely 76½ percent of the convictions show a gang without a penny back of anybody, or maybe a lone crook with nothing more than his suit of clothes to his back. Why am I handing you this piece of advice? Because, boy, always work in a gang where there's one worker handsomely fixed with property or coin; in hiring the best criminal lawyer that his money can get, he has an 81 percent chance for an acquittal by the jury. Then you'll get acquitted if they acquit him. Statistics and figures, boy, are never buncombe.' "

"I get you, Chief," said the round-faced cub. "This 'X,' being a collector, was probably somebody of standing in Chicago—owned property maybe, or a collection, or both. And this had turned into a murder job. Dan didn't have any capital back of his mob, and here was the fellow that would fulfill one of his own rules obtained from a long study of court statistics. Yeah, this fellow 'X' was too valuable in case the whole four went up for trial. He could finance a big defence. I get it."

"I do believe," O'Toole commented, to the whole assemblage, "that this mob seriously considered putting him out of the road, after they learned that he'd left the jack behind—and considering that I've got seven fine and different prints off that jack and one off the mirror—eight in all, and all different, including two thumbs—it'd be a good thing for 'em if they had. But they were probably camped in some swell joint—like, for instance, up

around the Wilson Avenue district—and they couldn't pull a noisy job like that without making certain that their descriptions would be broadcast all over the country. Any further questions?"

The dapper reporter with the carefully pressed trousers spoke. "Was it so that the fellow would be well heeled that you figured Dan let him take what he was after in the safe—something valuable?"

"No," pronounced O'Toole. "I figure that while Dan would realize the value of a man well heeled like this bird, he wouldn't want him to serve as a trip-up for the gang either. So it was up to him to keep the police away from any clues. All the things in that safe were worth something to somebody, somewhere. Now if we police reached this bird 'X' by investigating the curios we'd find, we could break him down easy and get the unmistakeable descriptions of the other three. Then we'd be able to reach out for Dan, Annie and Chihuahua Joe. So he let this 'X'—the first comer into the place—take what he came for; he took his own objective; and he locked the safe to delay things as many days as possible. The public guardian, you know, don't allow the police department to forcibly open safes, murder or no murder. That key was probably tossed in some ash can along under the L and ashes pulled over it. It was in Lake Michigan by ten this morning."

O'Toole looked about him, from face to face. There appeared now to be no further questions. He snapped open his watch. Then he stood up. There was a sudden scraping of chairs, as of men who were eager to spring to their typewriters or phones. He raised a hand. There was silence.

"It may interest you boys to know that I presented this case with its perfect dovetailing to the state's attorney himself at 5 o'clock. And it does dovetail, beyond all chance of error. One part fits another so perfectly that the whole thing couldn't be wrong in a million years—and it was all worked out by practical police work, no

theorizing! The date that Jech was watching fits exactly the date on which Gentleman Dan was to get out of the Massachusetts pen. Jech was killed with a ball from a reversely rifled revolver. Dan was one of five men who owned such a gun—and who knew nothing about the freak rifling. He was out on liberty far ahead of his date—had been out three days when this happened. He was sent up the last time for the theft of Mexican art and religious treasures. There never was a question about his getting 'em—his release was due to a flaw in his bill of indictment, not a doubt as to his guilt. Dan was in Chicago when he was captured. Jech lived here. Jech was a man who bought nothing but that sort of stuff, and who could gyp an ignoramus on such things. A short fly-weight girl was in this job, the shortness proved by the mirror coming down off the wall. Dan's moll was Corn-Tossel Annie—height four-foot ten. Dan is known to have got his info on the Mexican consulate job in Boston from Chihuahua Joe, a porter there, pockmarked. Pockmarked gypsy woman rents that hot-dog nook across from Jech's two—three—days ago, and accounts for her irregular comings and goings by some story of a sick kid over in gypsy land. Joe had been a track worker. They had a good sledge laid out, when none of 'em are supposedly able to handle such. Man who kicked in Jech's window knew he was deaf. Knew all about the steam chipping. Yet Dan didn't know Jech had sold his old chilled-steel 1880 spherical safe and substituted this sardine can; if he had, he'd have fetched electric drills for those rivets. He didn't. We find him falling back on Jech's own tools. Yet the tools contain a jack. Jech owned no car of any description. The jack, as it was to be used in this case, shows a weak man and an amateur. Fingerprints scattered over it are unknown to crookdom; further, there's none on the other tools. That shows a division of operations, with rubber

gloves used in the second phase. And rubber gloves again show a professional peterman. Dan was convicted twice on fingerprint evidence; he'll never again leave fingerprints behind him as long as he lives and as long as they make rubber gloves. No, boys, that's only the general backbone of what you've heard—and the state's attorney tells me it's the most perfect piece of dovetailing he's ever presented to a jury in twenty years of prosecution work; he says if and when this gang ever go up before a jury, a whole bushel of alibis in the face of this jigsaw wouldn't cause the jury to hesitate sixty seconds before giving 'em the limit. So I think I can say here's one case where our gang is convicted before it's actually apprehended, and catching 'em won't be hard now that we know who they are." He paused. "Well, when next you hear of practical police work, I want you to know that it *is* practical and not theoretical at all. Every police wire is buzzing tonight with this professional mob's descriptions—I've already got two men tabulating and classifying collectors of all sorts in the Chicago and greater-Chicago district—and within ninety days—for the state says it will rush the thing to trial—after the usual appeal and refusal of the Supreme Court to remand the case, you'll see four eggs—three hard-boiled and one soft—going to the chair, one, two, three, four." O'Toole looked at his watch again. "Now I'm going to ask you all to excuse me. I haven't had a bite to eat since morning. I've got to see a few people, then grab a ham sandwich, and then I'm due with my paraphernalia over at that Jech shop for a talk to the early comers to that show advertised for tonight. If we make the pinch before press-time, we'll let all the papers know by phone. Old Cap outside will give you the rogues' gallery numbers on this professional three—and you can get photo-prints of 'em all at the bureau of identification on your way back downtown." And with a brief nod of his head O'Toole

turned on his heel and vanished back through the swinging door into his own sanctum. The conference with the Press was over.

The newspapermen, obviously restless now, donned coats, grabbed cameras, buckled belts together, and, lighting cigarettes, vanished with either sheepish or hostile glances at each other.

Steever, too, buttoned his own very new coat together, and flowed with the exodus out into the outer room, thence into the corridor, out on the step and on the sidewalk itself. There he somewhat enviously watched the men hasten off in various directions, one jumping into a runabout, one swinging onto a streetcar, one flagging a taxicab. It was plain that there was much that had to be done on a story of this nature—layouts, pictures, copy. Steever had a faint idea, layman as he was in such things. And at length only himself and two others were left on the curb, with himself standing some distance from the other pair. But his attention was attracted by words of one, the tall sallow sad-faced reporter, in answer to the other, the dapper well-pressed one, who was examining some mechanism on the instrument board of a high priced car. The latter had said: "Jump in, Stearns; I'll take you downtown."

"Thanks, Bowman," the other man had replied. "I'll go along with you. Say, Bowman, do you know that old boy in there is a pirate if there ever was one? He did a wonderful piece of police work, and it'll put him down town at headquarters or I miss my guess. But there's just one thing, Bowman, that strikes me as not so good. Take his mathematical line of five men who had those reversely rifled guns. Good stuff. Good stuff. But he might have worked on that line for weeks. But he crossed it, just as he says, with another line—the 18 men or so who were due to blow out of various penitentiaries the coming December 17th. But, Bowman, that second line ought to be

credited to Oliver Oliver—yeah, you know him. For I was in the station this morning. And it was Oliver who handed that December 17th hot tip to Tom Mackin a little while before. Mackin didn't want it—and threw it at old O'Toole more or less as a joke. O'Toole had been in a blue funk up till then. He'd been scratching his head and looking foolish. When he heard Oliver Oliver had suggested looking up dates—or particularly the marked date—in Jech's life, his ears actually pricked up, and he rumbled off into his private office as though he was going to try out something. Bowman, the cross-line that gave him Gentleman Dan Kremer he stole from Oliver Oliver."

"Hells bells, Stearns," said the well-pressed man, "your butter is covered with bread only where the official department lies. These private Sherlock Holmes's never have the inside track that can get you anything. Sure—he ought to have credit, if what you say is true—but try and give it to him! That old boy wants the full glory—and if your city ed knows what's good for his sheet—he'll razz Oliver Oliver in his layouts and put a golden crown on O'Toole. He—all O.K. now, Stearns. Hop in."

And the two men climbed in and shot off from the curb westward, leaving Steever quite alone.

"Jehosephat!" he said to himself, still thinking more about the ultimate outcome of this dragnet than the ethics of where credit was due, "but I'd hate to be the Chicago curio collector who was Mr. X. For he's more sure to be nabbed than anybody else. The police can get his identity from beating up this Gentleman Dan Kremer if they catch him. And if Gentleman Dan eludes 'em by any chance, they'll work from now till doomsday getting the fingerprints of every collector in Chicago. Lord, I'd hate to be him. He went to rob that place—a guy was killed—he hasn't a defence to offer. He ought to commit suic—Well, f'r the luvva Mike—that poor fellow Hines! I clean forgot him." Steever gazed back in the direction of the

police station entrance, but hastily concluded that having been vised as a newspaperman in those precincts he had better not return in the guise of a simple messenger boy. And as he reflected on his doubtful capacity as such, his fingers in his pocket fell on the yellow telegram he was carrying to South Park Way.

"And oh Lord!" he groaned. "That wire from Bentleyville! I'd have been out there by this time. If Mr. Mattox ever learns I dawdled like this on my first job, I'm canned sure." He gazed about him troubledly toward blocked streetcars, and autos whirring by. "And now you get on the job pronto, you lazy loafer," he said to himself harshly. A taxicab whined up to the curb and disgorged a couple of loudly dressed men who looked more like gamblers who might be searching for immunity from the police than legitimate seekers after the law's protection. They went into the station, arguing. Mr. Steever signalled their dismissed taxi. He climbed in. All he had in the world was a few dollars—and taxi fare was taxi fare—but a certain sense of honesty with respect to an employer who had seemed sorely troubled and beset with perplexities told him that it was now up to him to penalize himself for loafing on the job.

"4010 South Park Way," he said, and settled down on the cushions.

CHAPTER XXX

SURPRISES ALL AROUND

IN the parlor of Horatio Silverthorne's home on South Park Way a bewildering, ominous silence followed the bibliophile's tense reply to the stern question as to why he had taken such measures to secure the Vindelinus.

Through Dirk Mattox's consciousness rumbled Silverthorne's dumbfounding words: "Then—then you know that I got it? How—how in God's name did you find that out?"

To which the younger man's only answer was to draw a hand feebly over his own forehead and stare at the other. At length he found his own voice. "Got it!" he ejaculated, quite ignoring the other's question. "But—but—the safe wasn't opened—at least—"

"Safe? What safe?" asked Silverthorne brusquely. "What safe do you mean?"

"Jech's safe—the strongbox in which the Vindelinus was being held."

"Yes, yes, yes! But how did you know I got it from Jech?"

Mattox wrinked his brow in perplexity. He arose suddenly and striding across the room to the tiny Chippendale desk at the other end, jerked out one of the drawers, and pulled forth the broad, orange-colored round trip airways ticket to New Orleans with its vividly checkered border. He brought it across the room. Without a word he thrust it into the other's fingers.

Silverthorne stared dumbly at it.

"I saw this sticking out from the desk this morning," Mattox went on, "when I called on Iolanthe. It has never been used. And early this morning an attempt was made to open Jech's safe by some one who plainly knew that

he was deaf. The result was that Jech saw the light or became alarmed in some other way, came downstairs, and was shot dead when he surprised the intruder. There was one man in Chicago who knew that safe contained something which he wanted more than anything in the world, something which he felt belonged to him and something which he could not raise money enough to buy. That—that man was Horatio Silverthorne!"

Mattox dropped back into his seat and hunched up, dropping his chin in his hand.

Silverthorne stared at the orange airways ticket and then gave a hard uneasy laugh.

"I see," he said at length. "I see, Mattox. What a beastly mess! And Jech—Jech's dead." He whistled. "I made it just in time, I reckon. I see I'll have to tell you the truth of the affair now. Yes; I got the Vindelinus."

"You really got it?" asked Mattox, still quite bewildered.

"But I did go to New Orleans, as well," continued the other. "And the trip, Mattox, was wholly on account of Vance, Iolanthe's brother."

"Vance," repeated the younger man in surprise. "Why—I never knew that you—"

"No; of course you didn't," interrupted Silverthorne. "And the reason is that Iolanthe and I have made it a point never to speak of his existence to others, unless his death or existence should be established. You see, Mattox, Vance left us before we came from New York to Chicago—and that, of course, was before you met Iolanthe. The boy was pretty harebrained and reckless. Then the old thing, too—the cabarets, and too much bootleg booze. One night he picked up a heavy square gin bottle and in a crazy fight over some night-club dancer smashed a friend of his over the head. And he got out before the police came."

"And the friend?" queried Mattox, leaning forward in his chair. "Did he live or die?"

"Fractured skull," replied Silverthorne in low tones. "In the newspaper accounts it was reported that he could not live. He hovered between life and death for several weeks, but in the end he came clear and well. Vance had never waited to be tried for murder. He cleared out that night without even Iolanthe or me having a chance to say good-by."

"And what became of him?" asked Mattox.

"Heaven only knows!" groaned the older man. "The friend recovered from the blow, but Vance had no way of knowing that. And of course he never returned to stand trial for what he thought was murder. Iolanthe and I moved on to Chicago a couple of years ago, but I've never given up my searching for Vance. I've had a press bureau furnish me clippings concerning all unidentified dead found in the various cities. And, in the meantime, something in the way of a complication ensued. Vance and Iolanthe's rich aunt in Florida died about three or four weeks ago—I guess Iolanthe never told you of that, for she's peculiar about such things. The old lady, a widow and childless too, left them a joint trust of a quarter of a million dollars in real estate and bonds, the negligible income and interest on which—pending their qualifying for the estate itself—was to go to some small cat home she was interested in in Miami. This trust was made payable to Vance and Iolanthe on the first anniversary of their aunt's wedding that should follow her death, which happens to be next week, providing both qualify with proof of living by putting in the customary personal appearances and identifications. On the other hand, in the event of the death of either one before both qualify, the survivor inherits all on presentation of his own proof of living and the legal proof of death of the deceased brother—or sister—as the

case might be. We had never even written to Vance's aunt, you see, of the trouble that he had got into.

"Well, Mattox, "Silverthorne went on, "you can readily see that in the unfortunate way she has drawn up her trust, without finding Vance we can't get a smell of the estate or a penny income on it for seven years at the shortest, for its provisions stipulate that both of my children must present proof of living—meaning personal appearance and identification—or else one must do so with proof of the other's death. And neither qualification is possible, for Vance is disappeared. To be sure, after he has been gone seven years—think of it, Mattox, seven long years from now—we can have him legally declared dead, and Iolanthe can inherit the whole trust; but all that time, Mattox, every penny of income from the trust will be going over to this cat home in Miami. The only way in which the deadlock could be upset would be for me to find Vance actually dead—to present his proof of death. Well, with this situation confronting us, and the trust company adamantine, there came the New Orleans clipping on yesterday's first mail, together with the bunch that arrive every week from the bureaus."

"And what did this particular clipping say?"

"It said that the body of a young man had been found floating in the Mississippi River off Canal Street, New Orleans; that the body was poorly dressed. The only signs of identification were a trio of Greek fraternity letters tattooed on his left forearm."

"I presume then," Mattox put in, "that Vance Silverthorne was marked on the left forearm with three Greek letters. So you immediately bought an air ticket and started for New Orleans last night. And it *was* Vance?"

"I bought the air ticket," said Silverthorne slowly, "thinking for a certainty that this must be the body of the poor boy, for he was tattooed with three Greek letters in the same place. And he had always had a fascination

for New Orleans too. Well, my clipping was four days old even then, and I was afraid that if I didn't make haste the body would be moved from the police morgue and buried in some potter's field—and I would have all sorts of troublesome red tape to untangle in order to get it exhumed and all that. And so I was packing to go. But at nine o'clock while I was right in the midst of it, a telephone call came from Casimer Jech himself. He asked me to run down to his place at once on a matter of a rare book that he had just got in and which he held for sale. Said it would interest me greatly. So naturally I went there first before going out to Checkerboard Field for the night plane south.

"And this book was the Vindelinus?" asked the younger man.

Silverthorne shook his head. "No; he had secured a rare Chinese book—one so old that when he took it from his safe the leaves fell all over the floor. It was the sayings of a certain old Chinese philosopher, but Jech would not tell how he had secured it. I have a knowledge of Oriental bibliography, and I recognized its genuineness as to age and antiquity. It was, according to the Oriental from whom Jech had secured it, entitled—that is, translated—'The Sayings of Tu Fu.' And who, versed in books, has not heard of Tu Fu?"

"I am now very interested," said Mattox grimly. "Please go on."

"He offered this latest thing in his stock to me for a thousand dollars," Silverthorne went on. "I liked it—Heaven knows I liked it! Yet I wanted that Vindelinus more than anything. I told him then that, after thinking things over, I was ready to offer him three thousand dollars for the two books, the Vindelinus and the Chinese book by Tu Fu, neither without the other."

"But where could you get three thousand dollars?" asked Mattox sternly. "You told me—"

Silverthorne looked sheepish. "A book collector, my boy, is a crazy man. He—he is worse than a gambler. I have spent everything I have ever had on my collection—with the exception of my annuity—and last night I got reckless and decided to slap a mortgage on this house and buy the Vindelinus. And, too, I thought it was certain that that was poor Vance lying dead in the New Orleans morgue, and that because of that Iolanthe could within a few days now qualify and take over the whole quarter of a million dollars. And she—well she wouldn't let her daddy's house be taken from over his head because—because of a paltry few thousand dollars. And I—well you see—on matters like a Vindelinus, Mattox, you have to work quickly—while the iron is hot. You see?"

"I see," said Mattox cynically. "Well, did Jech accept your offer?"

Silverthorne pursed up his lips. "We did a great deal of bargaining back and forth. At last we wound up at six thousand for the Vindelinus and five hundred for the old Tu Fu book, to be paid for by my one-year note for $6500, secured by my real estate here. Jech filled out a judgment note for that amount and a mortgage—he always had a bunch of blank legal forms about him because of a couple of cottages he owned in South Chicago—and as I had the legal description of this property memorized, we completed the deal at once. He knew my property had always been clear. And there was no risk in it for him. Why—with that note—he could have put my whole collection under the sheriff's hammer if my real estate here hadn't held sufficient margin. Well, so much for that. With the papers signed up, he brought out the dear Vindelinus, and confessed why he had been compelled to deny that he had it.

"It seems," Silverthorne continued, "that old Amos Carrington, the curio fiend on Lake Shore Drive, had hired him to steal it, then had fallen over with a stroke of

apoplexy and was slowly recovering. I was worried as to how he was going to square himself with old man Carrington, especially since he had foolishly written a letter to him saying that he had got the book. However, he waved my fears away with a smile. Said that old Carrington wasn't any more immune to being grasped where the hair was short than anybody else, and that he would shut Carrington's lips by pressure along a line the old millionaire couldn't defend himself against. He ordered me to keep mum, and when I left there I left with the dear book—that is, the Vindelinus—and 'The Sayings of Tu Fu' too—in my suitcase. I got a taxi outside for Checkerboard Field and made the south-bound plane O.K. I found, of course, that in the excitement of that telephone message from Jech I'd forgotten my round-trip ticket; but that ticket wasn't of any utility other than insuring me priority of accommodations against all emergency passengers, and I could turn it in later to the offices for full value when I should get back to Chicago. Well, the plane wasn't full up at all—there were several empty berths—so all I had to do was pay my $47.60 in cash to the steward and climb in. Thus I went to New Orleans. But—" Silverthorne's face grew grey and haggard as he paused. "But the body wasn't Vance's at all, Mattox. It—it was markedly older. It—why I couldn't even have proved by a single Eastern friend of our family that it was his. For one thing, it had perfect teeth—and Vance had had a number of molars removed and reconstruction work done in his mouth. Again, the height of this fellow was well under Vance's height. Again, there were no lobes on this fellow's ears." Silverthorne shook his head. It was obvious from one brief sentence the book collector had let drop that he must have thought desperately for a second in New Orleans of trying to bring back this body and foist it on the trust company as his son's, but had had to give the idea up. And now he was speaking again. "But as I

say—it wasn't Vance. And now I've gone and mortgaged my house. My note and mortgage is among Jech's legal papers, and I've got to pay the administrators of his estate just the same as though he were alive. And I'm wondering if—" He stopped wearily.

"You are certainly in one peck of fool financial trouble," commented Mattox bitterly. "Of all things—to mortgage your home—the only thing you've got left—just because of three Greek letters on a floater's arm! Why there's hundreds of frat men that have had that done in their day. And of all nights to leave Chicago—the very night when Jech was being murdered. Suppose the police had suspected you, through digging up something about your having been a customer of Jech's. Could you have proved an alibi by that outgoing air trip?"

"I'm afraid not," said Silverthorne glumly. "The big monoplane was nearly ready to hop off when I got to the runway. I was last man on. Only man I saw was the steward, for I didn't go up in the front compartment where the chairs are at all. You see, Mattox, while I'm not afraid of the air in the least—fatalist, maybe—I *am* frightfully subject to air sickness if I sit erect. So I climbed into my berth at once. The steward straightened things out in there for me, took my emergency fare, told me he'd put a receipt in there a little while later, and told me this was his last trip—he was taking a boat to South America when the plane should land at New Orleans. Well, I didn't find his cash fare receipt when I got out there next morning, and I really believe the fellow decamped with $47.60 belonging to the Southern and Gulf Coast Airways. I was clean exhausted when I stretched out in that berth, and as soon as I put the cotton in my ears I dropped off to sleep at once. I remember our hitting the landing field at Memphis, but didn't even remember the take-off. In fact, my second waking was when we hit the ground of the air field at New Orleans with a bang and taxied to a landing. I had to get

my clothes on, and so I was last out of the berths and last down the steps at the side of the plane—the pilot and passengers had all left the plane and the field. No sign of the steward. So what you say about an alibi is somewhat true. I honestly haven't any proof that I left Chicago last night by air except that rascal who took my fare and straightened out my berth."

"And how about your homeward trip?" Mattox asked curiously of the man who, in spite of all his astuteness in matters of old books, seemed to have a penchant for fumbling his own affairs most atrociously.

"Well, I had breakfast up on Canal Street, and went over to the morgue. The body was there and it wasn't Vance's, as I told you. I didn't even give my name, and the one fellow in charge wasn't much interested. He was a porter swabbing the floor. He just nodded his head and directed me to go in the other room. So I left the morgue after satisfying myself this was the body with the three Greek letters. I'd stuck tight to my suitcase all the time; of course I wouldn't check a thing containing a $50,000 book. Well, I'd had enough of New Orleans. My heart was heavy about my finances—although I was awful happy about the Vindelinus. I consulted a railroad and plane timetable in the same restaurant where I'd eaten, and saw that a plane left for the north at midday fitted with berths for people subject to air sickness like myself, and that it would cover the 900 miles in about 7 hours—same time as it used to take by rail from Chicago to St. Louis if you'll remember those ancient days. The steward—yes, that rascal—on the way south had told me there was very little traffic going back north—they were almost flying the planes empty just to get 'em back. Well, I got tired of sitting in the park, and so bought some magazines and went on to the airport. This time I was first on. Pilot not on duty. Steward neither, as I found out. Just a temporary caretaker. He took my cash fare and gave me a receipt. I climbed

into the berth he pointed out, drew my curtains to, and opened my magazines. Kept my clothes on. Heard a few people come aboard with luggage. Heard the regular steward come on duty; and heard the temporary caretaker tell him about the gentleman in No. 4—that was me—and turn over the money to him. Pretty soon they turned us head into the wind, and we took off, and were roaring north. We had more rocky sailing this time—air pockets at several places, and a bit of a windstorm after a couple of hours. I was a bit squeamish even in spite of lying flat on my back. And I'd have been sick as a dog if I'd been sitting up. Steward rapped several times and asked me if I wanted a little food, but I called out to him, no, nothing. When we got to Chicago, and circled for a landing on the field, there was delay because another big plane was circling, too, to come down. It was that big plane from Canada that rescued that fellow lost in the Canadian Northwest. Coming through the Loop later on the L, I bought a late newspaper, and the headlines were already carrying the news. It's in my coat pocket if you want to see it. At any rate, as I say, the field was well dotted with newspapermen, and curiosity seekers, and hangar attendants; the beacon lights and flood lights were all turned on even though it wasn't quite deeply dark yet. And that Canadian plane came down a few seconds after we did, and taxied up to not far from where we wound up. Everyone started running toward it. Our passengers—our crew too—all piled off at once to get a better look at this fellow who was lost so many days, and that left me quite alone. So I left my receipt and my magazines, took my suitcase and walked off in the darkness where I got a local street-car to the Metropolitan L—thence the South Side L home here. And here I am."

"A devil of an alibi you'd have had," commented Mattox, shaking his head. "All hazy—all tenuous—all vague. It's a good thing, Mr. Silverthorne, that it's me and not the police that you recite this to. I know you. And I know

you're telling the truth. But the police would give you the toughest night you ever had if they had an idea you knew anything at all about the Jech murder, for they'd be certain this was a staged alibi. Nobody sees you on the way to New Orleans because you're the last man on. And nobody sees you coming back, because you're the first man on! Steward decamps on the out-trip. Stewards change on the back trip; you leave your fare receipt in your berth. Everybody is watching another plane when you get off. You don't register your name or anything at the New Orleans morgue, and don't make any business or social calls. And as a result of all this, nobody can actually vouch for it that Horatio Silverthorne of 4010 South Park Way, Chicago, was flying to and from New Orleans." He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, it doesn't matter luckily. The police have no occasion to tie you to the Jech job. They've got some few tools—including an automobile jack, which I understand by a late paper is rumored to have plenty of fingerprints on it. The jack ought to—"

"That was my jack," put in Silverthorne hastily.

"Your jack?" bit out Mattox. "Your—why—what—"

"Yes," said Silverthorne helplessly. "I was out to Maywood a few days ago to see the airplane meet and the stunt flying over Checkerboard Field. Fellow near the field had an all-night auto parts and tool shop, selling oil and gas and everything even down to ham sandwiches and pop. I bought a jack like the one he had on his exhibition shelf, for I happened to need one for my little car. Well, when I got home and unwrapped the paper that was sealed around it in lieu of a carton, it wasn't like the one the price tag was on. I was a bit hot under the collar and called him up over long-distance toll and told him. He said if I'd bring it back he'd give me the one shown or my money back. Well, I didn't think I'd ever have occasion to go back to Maywood again, but when this New Orleans thing came up unexpectedly and I saw I would have to leave by Checker-

board Field if I went by air, I saw that here was my chance to get that error fixed up or my money back. The jack was new and not dirty, and as I had enough room in my suitcase I stuck it in and jammed the covers shut. And then Jech called me up. I went to his place, as you know. He conducted me back into the office. After we made our dicker and he took my note and turned over the two precious books to me, he went down in the store and up to the front to call up Carrington's man on Lake Shore Drive and find out how the old boy was doing. While he was trying to get his connection, I tried to put the two books in my suitcase—but I couldn't get 'em in, at least without squeezing them fearfully, for that cursed jack caused too much compression. So I took it out and laid it over near the wall —let's see—over near the safe—yes, between the safe and the wall where it wouldn't be in the way—and managed to pack the Tu Fu book and the dear Vindelinus in without a bit of unnecessary pressure in any direction, so that it—or they—couldn't slide or slip or rattle or anything. It was a perfect piece of packing, Mattox. It—"

"I'll bet it was," commented Mattox drily. "I'll wager a newly-born infant couldn't have been swathed in pink cotton more scientifically than that book got placed between your things in that suitcase. Well—what next?"

"Jech had got his connection at last when I snapped my suitcase shut. He was talking when I came on down the step into the store. I didn't see where I dared wait—particularly since there was nothing further to tell him other than that I'd left my jack in an out-of-the-way place and would pick it up some day. So I waved goodbye to him and went on out, where I flagged a taxi going by. And in this I reached Checkerboard Field in time, as I said."

"Jumping Jehosephat!" said Mattox appalled. "Of all the messes, Mr. Silverthorne! Of all the beastly messes. Why it's nearly as bad as I first feared. That jack happened to fit in beautifully with the picture that the scene

of the crime was presenting." He paused a second, thinking. "Now the intruder who came to Jech's shop evidently figured on tilting or leveraging the safe into position to put certain woolen pads he'd made under each of the legs, and the jack you left in that out-of-the-way nook has naturally been tied up by police inference to that proposed operation. And no doubt you say to yourself: what's the difference anyway? Well I'll say that it makes a lot of difference. For instance: do you realize, Mr. Silverthorne, that even if it had been intended to lift this safe bodily up by sheer muscle power of two persons—you see there's been something in the papers about a couple of powerful Amazons, negresses, safecrackers—former circus acrobats—being under suspicion—the existence of that jack only points to an operator with a none too strong physique like yours; an indoor man with no power in his muscles? And you've given somebody else an alibi in a certain sense, and thrown a clue to yourself—or a person like yourself. Still worse, that jack's got fresh fingerprints on it. You say you took it out of the original paper carton. You deposited it where it lay until the police found it. All right. Those fingerprints are yours. And don't you suppose the police will work for months running down collectors' fingerprints, trying to solve the ownership of that jack, even if they don't make inquiries of all auto tool stores as far out as Maywood and find out that there was a jack bought there, and a complaint made about it by a man in Chicago? Remember, you called up over toll. All of those calls are of record. There wouldn't be many hundred calls that day between Chicago and Maywood. There's something for some astute policeman to work on. Why—Mr. Silverthorne—they'll reach you ultimately as sure as fate."

"Good God, though, Mattox, what would you expect me to do at this point?" said Silverthorne with a gesture of his hands. "I'd be putting myself in a worse mess—sticking my neck in some sort of a noose if I went to the police and

openly explained that the jack was mine. They'd put me under the third degree, beat me half to death, rush me from station to station so that you folks couldn't get a writ of habeas corpus for me, keep me awake for thirty-six to seventy-two hours, and I'd have to sign some sort of a cock-and-bull confession to save myself from further torture. Sure—in a trial I could repudiate it—but good God, Mattox, the agony and the notoriety! No, the only logical thing to do—the only decent thing for everybody concerned that I *can* do—is to keep a shut mouth forever—so long as I'm innocent." He paused, reflecting. "No, Mattox, I don't think the police will follow up collectors. They haven't brains enough to conceive of such a possible angle. What they'll do will be to compare those fingerprints with every cracksman's prints in America in every rogues' gallery. That'll take 'em months and months and eventually it will come to nothing. By the time they get done with a world-wide job like that, the whole thing'll be ancient history, forgotten." He shook his head again. "No, Mattox, it's my financial mess that's my real trouble. For I've mortgaged my home in the profound belief that that body was Vance's and that Iolanthe would be collecting her share—in that case, all of it—of that inheritance. I haven't a penny in the world to pay that note off with, and I'll have to settle it with whoever administers Jech's estate. Now if that body had been Vance's, I would have—"

Silverthorne's words were broken off by a knock at the parlor door. He called "Come in!" and the door opened, revealing the black person of Mammy Johnson.

"Massa Silvert'orne, dey's a man at de do' w'at wan' to see Mista Mattox. In fac'—" She pulled from her bandanna sleeve a yellow envelope and held it forth. "He say he done got dis fo' Mista Mattox an' he wait outside to see if de's anny mo' 'structions."

Mattox rose quickly from his chair and took the telegram from her fingers. As he did so, Iolanthe came down the

hall and, smiling, turned into the parlor. "All the secrets over?" she asked. "If not, I'll go away again."

Mattox opened the envelope and quickly read the contents. The message had been wired from Bentleyville, Ohio. It ran:

> Learned there was landing field twenty miles from Bentleyville and managed to get my friend Tommy Parker, who was going to Schenectady, New York, with his Eagle bi-plane, to take us aboard. So arrived in plenty of daylight, and came out in fast car. Jade hand weighed four hundred and thirty-seven grains, but found the satchel neatly sodded over at four hundred and forty-nine paces on direct line with finger when floated as already demonstrated. Discrepancy evidently lay in size of paces. Long live Oriental wisdom and cunning. Two hundred thousand in cold cash and unregistered Liberty Bonds in satchel, and just beginning to get mildewed.
>
> OLIVER OLIVER.

Mattox looked up from the telegram. "I've just got some interesting news," he remarked to Iolanthe and her father, "and news which by the way is tangled up with poor Jech. In fact, I've quite a strange story to tell you both in a minute. It seems that we've all been mixed up with Jech in various ways. I imagine—"

He turned to the negro woman. "Show the bearer of this message in please, mammy." He turned to the others. "I want you both to meet quite a character, and one whom you'll see often when you stop in at the office. He's my new assistant, Mr. Thomas Steever; he—"

The negro woman appeared in the doorway a second later, with Steever at her shoulder. The newcomer stepped in rather gingerly, cap in hand, but before he had advanced five steps his mouth fell open and his eyes popped from his head.

"Merciful God!" His cry became that of a tired little boy. "Father! And Io!"

CHAPTER XXXI

THE UNRETURNABLE TOKEN

THE tableau was broken by Silverthorne himself.

"Vance!" His voice held a strange note—a note of fatherly love in it. And his exclamation was followed by the girl's happy, surprised cry: "Oh Vannie, and you've really come back to us! He didn't die, Vannie. He lived. And—and you're not a murderer." And as she ran up to him and seized his thin peaked face in her hands, the tone of her voice—a tone which the dumbfounded Mattox thus far had never heard in her utterances—sent strange little thrills up and down his spine.

Silverthorne closed the door quickly. They all sat down, the newcomer close to the bibliophile, his hand held tight in the hand of the latter; Iolanthe and Mattox close together on the davenport. Then came long explanations and a story of a boy's strange wanderings on boxcars back and forth between the coasts, always at first in terror of the law, always at first fearing the pressure of a hand on his shoulder and his arrest as a fugitive on a charge of murder; then the sudden realization one day that the only photograph of himself in existence showed him with a mustache that long since had been shaved off; that with this violent change and his otherwise generally altered appearance, the police must have forgotten such a one as he; but always paramount in his mind the knowledge that mail addressed to his father and sister—supposedly living in New York City—would be watched, their friends perhaps also—that never again could he see them, communicate with them; that he was a pariah, doomed to pseudonymity for the rest of his days. And following that, the older man spoke, the erstwhile Steever—now Vance Silverthorne—staring around hungrily

at the homelike parlor, and its rich furnishings. And Silverthorne's story was of a certain aunt in Florida—of a certain huge joint trust estate that in but a few more days now could be claimed by the two younger persons.

But of a sudden, as the bibliophile spoke, Mattox's face fell. He turned to Iolanthe. His words held a peculiar desperation in them.

"Io," he said weakly, "I—I can't marry you now. You're worth a half of a quarter-million—an heiress—and I'm worth nothing but a little typewriter patent valued at scarcely more than twenty-five hundred dollars. You, with—"

"Thank God," she breathed aloud, "that I realized your strange, foolish pride, Dirk." She held up her hand on which Mattox's diamond glittered. "See, daddy—and Vannie. Dirk has asked me to marry him—when I had nothing. I accepted him. And he has sealed the compact in the old, wonderful way."

Mattox stared at the blue-green rays scintillating, sparkling, flashing from the gem, and he smiled a half smile, realizing that indeed his cursed pride had been trapped for once. He put one arm round the girl's slim waist, and spoke but a brief two sentences.

"You win, little girl. I guess I wouldn't back out if I wanted to."

A silence followed, then Vance Silverthorne spoke up, addressing his words to Mattox.

"And say, Mr. Mattox, don't think that I'm going to quit you now that we've had this development or on account of this money that's come to me. I'm going to stick right on—at whatever you pay me, inheritance or no inheritance. The Mattox Noiseless Platen is a wonder in my estimation, and we ought to be able to develop the business end of it so that we'll have orders from all over the world." He paused. "No more night-clubs for me. No more cabarets—wet or dry—for mine. I'm cured. I'm done. In fact, I've

a peculiar hunch that my life changed with the finding of an odd little green jade hand in a bowl of chop-suey. That hand brought me a dollar cash, and gave me a resting spell and a chance to read the newspapers. On account of that I saw an ad about it, and I got fifty dollars more for telling a woman in the Ontario Hotel on the North Side whom I sold it to. Then on top of that a job with you through the clothing and shoes and cap and shave that that fifty bought. And now I'm going to follow up my luck." He paused again and this time addressed the whole assemblage.

"And tonight as I came on to this number to deliver that telegram I walked in upon what is nearly the last act of this drama. It concerns the poor old guy on East 22nd Street who started my ball a-rolling for me with a dollar."

"Jech—Casimer Jech, the curio dealer?" echoed Mattox dumbly.

"The man who was killed by a cracksman?" repeated the elder Silverthorne unbelievingly.

Vance Silverthorne smiled a quizzical smile. "That's the one—Jech—who started my luck by giving me a dollar for a little trinket of green jade. But I'll explain." He paused. "I started from the office tonight by way of South State Street, intending to transfer on the nearest crosstown car to the 40-hundreds and go east. At 22nd Street, however, it was a case of 'all off' because of subway construction at the corner. Well, I recognized the peculiar district at once, as well as a certain flapping sign out over the curio store; but I was sure surprised to see a patrolman stationed in front of the little place where I made my first business call in Chicago. I just naturally went on over. The inside of the windows had all been covered with some kind of a chalkwash, and on each an inscription had been lettered about some wonderful show to take place there at 9:30 tonight, costing a dollar. It said to ask the patrolman, which I did, and he told me a little about this fellow Jech being killed by a cracksman last night and so forth. It seems this

fellow wanted to get off duty and he handed me his own ticket provided I'd run over to his station and deliver a message. I took him on—for reasons of my own. And my reasons got smaller and smaller the nearer I got to that station. When I finally reached it, I was clean stumped, because I had that horrible feeling that 'wanted' was lettered all over me. But I said to myself just what I said when this patrolman gave me the mission—that until I put myself to the acid test once I'd be skulking and trembling for the rest of my days. Well, it's a long story about my trip inside that police station and what happened, but enough to say that nobody even paid any attention to me, much less asking about my antecedents. Some evening or day when there's more time, perhaps I'll bore you all with the account of my experiences inside. But I—well, have a look at the ticket I earned. Only I'm afraid I didn't earn it."

With which cryptic remark Vance Silverthorne reached into his coat pocket and brought forth a bright red square of cardboard, crudely printed, which he handed first to his father who read it with set, impassive face, and then silently passed it to the girl who did likewise and then passed it over to Dirk Mattox. Mattox fixed his attention on the printed square.

"Of course," he said dryly, looking up from it at length, "it's a miserable sort of a hoax—all these benefits are, but—" He turned to Silverthorne and Vance, then to Iolanthe. He spoke more in the direction of the girl than of the two men. "Seems to me that the only decent thing I can do is to fade out of here and let you folks hold a family reunion. What I'd like to do while you're all getting acquainted again is to run down and see this shop of Jech's before it's dismantled for good and all, as it soon will be, for it's figured a bit prominently in my emotions—too prominently—I can tell you." He looked at his watch. "Nine-fifteen? I can make it in plenty of time, I guess. Will you folks excuse me?"

EXHIBITION EXTRAORDINARY!!

To Members of the Press, Their Friends, and Others Interested in Crime.

ADMISSION ONE DOLLAR.

SIMON GRUNDT,

Formerly of the Lincoln School for the Feeble Minded, Known to the 22nd Street Police Station as

SIMPLE SIMON

and to the Great Detective World as

HAWKSHAW THE SECOND

Will Give a Marvelous Demonstration of his Methods in Crime Solution, Explaining His Various Modes of Disguise, Deduction, and Examination for the Clues, in the Attempt to Determine Both the Sex and the Identity of the Criminal Who Shot

Casimer Jech of East 22nd Street.

Show Starts Promptly at Nine-thirty P. M., at the Dead Man's Store, 14 East 22nd Street. Admission Limited to 250.
All Profits to the Plainclothesmen's Association Fund.

A SCREAM! DON'T MISS IT!

Silverthorne too looked at his watch. "I would—I would like to see any closing chapters of anything that concerned —concerned my friend Jech. For he *was* my friend, even though he was a hard one, maybe."

Mattox scratched his chin dubiously. "I honestly believe, Mr. Silverthorne," he began, "that if I were you, I—well—I wouldn't go around there." He looked oddly at the boy and girl who seemed surprised by his statement. "Your father, you know—" he faltered. "Collector. Chicago collector. And Jech was a curio dealer—you know the fool police—he might be recognized as a collector—questioned

a bit maybe—embarrassing—and all that—" He stopped, at a loss for words.

"Nonsense, Mattox," said Silverthorne. "Even if I'd done it, I'd be safe until the police got around to me on their mental slow train through Arkansas."

Mattox had his apprehensions somehow. But he couldn't explain himself. His thoughts were sent scattering by Vance Silverthorne.

"I'll go with you two," he said slowly. "This thing has become of considerable interest to me for reasons which I can explain when we have more time. Only—" He turned toward his sister. "—but Sis here—"

"Sis here will solve the problem presented by her presence," the girl nodded, "by just going along with all of you. I want to go. I'll get my wrap."

Silverthorne made a helpless gesture, indicating plainly that he had lived with one youthful specimen of the newer generation, as well as fair sex, long enough to know something about their ultimatums. He smiled toward his son, a happy smile, for, forsooth, his troubles were over—concerning a judgment note for $6500 to one Casimer Jech. Yet the smile fading so quickly indicated that he wasn't so buoyant after all. "Run out, Vance," he said quietly, "and flag the first taxi. And we'll be out in a minute—all of us."

It was less than three minutes before the four who a moment ago had been seated in the Silverthorne parlor were bowling along South Park Way in the interior of a yellow taxi; and ten or twelve minutes later they were dismounting in front of the East 22nd Street curio shop. It was as Vance had described: the windows were coated with chalkwash, and from the lighted up interior emanated a buzz and a stir as of many people and the loud forceful talking of some official speaker. People were passing in at intervals, handing red squares to either of two trig khaki-clad patrolmen now situated on each side of the narrow door, and

Silverthorne, striding forward with three crisp bills in his hand, exchanged them for squares, passed the set together with the one Vance had brought home, to the man on the right, and as the officer on the left swung open the narrow door, he motioned his companions to follow him inside.

Down the very short flight of steps they picked their way gingerly, and once inside—the door closed upon their rear—they surveyed from the back of the store the sea of heads, the huge throng of morbid curiosity seekers who stood packed shoulder to shoulder. Many, many changes had taken place, Mattox perceived at once: the crude partition of matched boards that formerly separated office from store had been taken down bodily and stacked against one wall, and now only a rope stretched across to separate the two spaces. The paraphernalia and showcases that had been part of the store had, likewise, been carried upstairs, evidently to protect them from marauders and to give the maximum of room. The platform presented by the raised floor of the office, formerly reached by a well-worn step from the store, now provided a perfect stage for what was either going on or what was to go on, and moreover it was brightly illumined by a series of electric bulbs hung loosely from the stretched rope.

And it was well that it was thus raised, and cut off likewise, for the mass of heads, turning ever this way and that, looked to comprise perhaps four hundred, and even as this new party comprising Mattox, Silverthorne and the latter's family stood in indecision, the sound of the door opening in back of them showed that more were coming in all the time to add to the pressure in back of this legion. Morbid curiosity seekers a-plenty were in evidence; toughs, with caps over eye, too; and gentlemen with quizzical mien. A silk-gowned lady or two threw a dash of color in the crowd, to which was added splashes of indigo blue by laboring men in overalls; a silk hat stuck up grotesquely at one side, and at one or two other points could be seen fearfully

painted and bright-eyed girls from the levee district not far west of this point; newspapermen with cameras slung over shoulders jostled checksuited gamblers from the tenderloin district east; a couple of pasty white faces, twitching a bit as they looked back, showed that the victims of narcotics could feel a transient interest in the passing of a human being; and perhaps the most impassive faces of all were those of several stolid looking Chinese gazing unblinkingly from almond-shaped eyes. It was a motley assemblage indeed. And at one dollar per head, it was evident that the highest of high-pressure salesmanship had been used for the plain-clothes men's association, and that any balls or other affairs they might give might come out without a single red entry on their ledger!

The old adage that the late comer gets the pick of positions was here beautifully exemplified; for as Mattox surveyed with considerable dubiousness the mosaic presented by this ill-assorted and restive group, he saw Silverthorne nod his head to the right where, between the crowd and the the wall, the barest suggestion of a lane had formed leading, moreover, a short distance up front. Pressing forward in Silverthorne's wake, the adage was further proven, for against the wall a narrow boxlike structure had been built for some five or six feet over some steam pipes that came forth from it, and in a second Silverthorne had helped the girl up on top of it where she would stand in front of them all, and he himself then climbed up on this narrow but higher prominence, followed by his son and Mattox. And now indeed, by dint of standing straight and erect, and flat against the wall, they had the pick of positions to watch the proceedings, such as they might be, on that raised platform.

Evidently there had been some speaking—the same speaking which Mattox and his party had heard from the outside, but which had come to an end after their entry. The stage, however, was occupied by a beefy-necked indi-

vidual with an old blue police cap cocked on one side of his head, and a uniformed patrolman standing to one edge of the stage and an undoubted plain-clothes man who sat off to the other side on a straight-backed chair with his legs crossed, completed the actors in this preliminary drama. That the speaker had been the beefy-necked man and that he had evidently only stopped to rest his voice, or take a drink of water, or both, was indicated by the presence in front of him of a wooden dictionary stand being utilized as a speaker's table, on which stood a cracked china pitcher of water and a tumbler of thick glass, an old battered revolver, minus barrel, which had been used presumably for some sort of demonstration, and some slender white tapers that looked like they might be wax. In the corner still stood impassive the iron safe which had constituted the cause of the previous night's killing, and the simple furnishings of the entire scene were there, just as Mattox had viewed them that morning, even to the flight of steps at one side leading upstairs.

Although it must have been more, by far, than nine-thirty, it seemed evident from the remark of the man in the blue police cap that the occupants of the platform were perhaps now only marking time and keeping the crowd from becoming restive, for he nodded to the man in the chair and massaged his throat with his pudgy forefingers. "I'll give my voice a rest now, Frank," he said a bit hoarsely. "You talk to 'em." And he exchanged chairs with the other.

The plain-clothes man advanced to the rope. The crowd restive, with low comments buzzing here and there, at once grew attentive again. Silence filled the Jech shop.

"Now, ladies and gents, our main feature of the evenin', Hawkshaw th' Famous, is a little late in gettin' here. So don't get impatient. I'm sure you've all enjoyed the wonderful talk you've just received from Chief Dennis O'Toole of this district, and for them what come in after Chief

O'Toole started, an' for them what missed his wonderful demonstration showing exactly how this rotten crime was solved in one day by practical police work, I may give a few further words o' explanation later myself. An' in case some of you people are afraid you ain't goin' to get your money's worth, I'm just going to say this: you've had it already. Not only have you been let in on a big news-story that you'll be readin' about over your coffee tomorrow mornin', but you've had the privilege o' hearin' them there details give you straight from a real criminologist. For, folks, Chief O'Toole, the man who has just spoke, is a criminologist—an' he's the foremost authority, I won't hesitate none to say, on safe-crackers and safe-crackin' jobs in this here whole United States. He's made a life study of it. Chief O'Toole has been in th' foreground o' some of the biggest bank-robbery jobs in this country—in both his private agency experience and his public experience—an' he knows yeggs as no other man in the country knows 'em. Nor is they any criminologist more qualified to talk to you all here and tonight, right where this dirty rotten yegg job was pulled off, than the Chief hisself, because, it bein' less'n a coupla blocks from our station, the Chief hisself was able t' make a first-hand study o' the job and get a number of observations which, to you people what come early, he's already expounded. For the Chief knew this man Jech; and he's taken a special intrust in this here rotten case. He—he—why he—you see—that is—" It was evident that the speaker's flow of oratory had come to one of those sudden finishes which frequently mark public speaking, and the blue-capped man, with a grimace, stepped back once more to the rostrum.

His demeanor was the easy demeanor of the natural speaker—the natural meeter of men. He cleared his throat and spoke, a bit huskily.

"I want to thank Brother Higgins yonder for the kind remarks he's made about me. It's true—as he says—that I

have made a life study o' yeggs and their doings, and if that makes me a criminologist—then I suppose that's what I am. I don't claim to know so much, though, about forgeries and such things—I leave such to other experts. An' it's true that I *have* made a close study of this job because it was pulled off right near our outfit, and because I've known this man Jech for some years." He paused. "But before I wind up my final words, I want to thank each and everyone of you for your attendance here tonight. It means a lot to the boys—the boys in citizen's clothing, you know, who're giving th' plain-clothes men's ball at Firemen's Hall next week. An' I just want to say this—on their behalf I want to invite one and all of you to the ball. It's only a dollar for a gent and his lady. They want to make it a big success—so help the boys out, folks. And to any grifters, bad actors, snitches, boosters, lamsters that might be here tonight—in fact, it don't matter none what your grift is, or whether the state's attorney's office is lookin' for you—I want to say that on the night of that ball you're as safe as you was in your mother's crib, from the hour you enter Firemen's Hall till four or five in the morning when you pull out. O' course, after that, we all got to get down to business—and then's your lookout. But there won't be nary hand laid on you—even if you're wanted for murder—between them hours. So come one—come all. Make the ball a big success and help the boys, who work hard and long hours."

He mopped off his brow from the effort of delivering this important announcement; the crowd was settled into the pleased complacency of a throng entertained by words, if not by deeds.

"And now, folks, while we're waiting for Hawkshaw the Famous to get here, and amuse you a little bit, I want to take this occasion, seeing that everybody that's come in here has paid out a hard-earned dollar to help the boys, to give all these here late comers that've been filing in an idee

o' what I've been demonstrating up here." He paused. "To you late comers, I want to say I've been showing the difference between practical crime solution and the theoretical Sherlock Holmes sort o' stuff which you all read about in your magazines.

"And it's been in relation to this here Jech crime, about which you've read in the papers. Which if you hadn't all read about it, you wouldn't be here; so I don't need to rehearse that. I've been showing these intelligent people here a splendid example of the different way in which us police work and one of these here fiction detectives works. Now see that calendar hanging on that wall—" he indicated the gaudy lithographed calendar hanging on the side wall of the one-time office, which showed the British aviator who crossed the Pacific landing in China. "And note that all the leaves but one has been torn off, and that leaf has 'December' printed on it? And see that red circle carefully marked around the 17th day of it? Yes, the coming 17th of December. Take a good look at that, you newcomers. For by that single little circle on that calendar leaf which shows a date this man was watching for—a date when a famous cracksman was to be out of the pen—was we police able to coordinate, and perfectly too, a number of other disconnected data such as that mirror standing on that radiator back of me, a collection of tools and woolen pads including a jack, none of which are here, some fingerprints and a lead bullet with reversed rifling marked on it; an' crystallize that whole thing into a police department message covering the entire United States tonight calling for the arrest dead or alive of a tow-headed gunman's moll named Corntossel Annie, a pockmarked Mex known as Chihuahua Joe Gonzalez, an educated yegg known as Gentleman Dan Kremer who twice—as it'll be discovered—stole the Joseph an' Mary vestal lamp belonging to the Cathedral of the City of Mexico; and a collector of curios, identity as yet unknown. And by that there same circle,

friends—you newcomers—a theoretical detective winds up with a short red pencil in a man's pocket and nothing else! Ain't that hot, friends?" He paused. "Now, folks, I don't think I'll have time to give you further demonstrations with these wax tapers about the rifling that's inside o' guns and revolvers, because we've been dealing quite a while now with meaty things and it's time, I think, for a little light entertainment. I—" There were sounds of a taxicab whining up to the curb of the shop outside, and almost simultaneously with it the front door of the shop opened, and one of the patrolmen stationed in front thrust his head in, nodding vehemently to the speaker. The speaker went hastily on.

"Well, folks, he's here. You were all told today and this evening that you were going to meet a funny character tonight. And so you are. His name is Simon Grundt, and, friends, he's famous—because he's the one of the descendants of the famous Jukes family that's written up in all the text-books on nuts and bugs an' so forth. Escaped from the Lincoln School for the Feeble-Minded, at Lincoln, Illinois, and got picked up by our Thirty-Fifth District station. We take good care of him, feed him, and let him run an errand now and then because he amuses all of us in our otherwise serious work. He thinks, folks, that's he's Hawkshaw, the Famous Detective. Yes, the one in the nickel novels of your boyhood. He's got a lot o' absurd tricks he pulls, and we've told him tonight that the mayor has called him in on this case. I want you to regard this poor idiot as just a bit of amusement—a bit of clowning, as it were—the lighter side of life. Kid him a bit if you want to; that'll stir him up to doing more funny things. And I thank you one an' all for your atten—"

His words were interrupted by the throwing open of the front door of the shop and the loud toot of the police whistles of both men stationed on the sidewalk. The opening of a waiting taxicab door was audible to the hundreds

crowded within. Cries from a dozen plain-clothes men spread about in the audience, evidently as a claque, sounded forth in unison. "Hawkshaw's here! Here he comes!" And from the other side of the assemblage a like group began to shout in concert: "Make way for the Great Hawkshaw!" "Split apart there, crowd, and let the Famous Hawkshaw pass!" "One side—one side—the Great Hawkshaw is coming."

CHAPTER XXXII

THE GREAT HAWKSHAW

THE crowd, all looking behind itself as though it were one man instead of four hundred or so souls, split apart into a distinct aisle as a crowd of three beefy-necked policemen blowing police whistles clambered down the narrow steps, propelling before them a most peculiar looking character, a rather pitiful character, it was to be admitted. He was swathed in a tattered raincoat that had seen better days and many of them, and on his head he wore a checked cap with long beak and buttoned flaps, exactly like that famous piece of headgear owned by Sherlock Holmes himself. A huge hairy black beard was glued to his face with courtplaster, and his eyes were covered by an enormous pair of sun-goggles. A white cotton mustache with drooping ends completed the horrendous hirsute adornment, and he carried white canvas gloves and a walking stick that had been patched with string and wire.

His entrance was a strut, rather than a walk, and his progress through the aisle opened up for him, as the detectives on all sides continued to shout "Make way for Hawkshaw!" was a triumphal procession. And thus at last, leaving his energetic bodyguard to become part of the front ranks of the audience, he clambered up underneath the rope and onto the raised platform.

He vouchsafed not even a single glance toward the sea of faces. Stroking his black beard, he deposited his patched cane on a convenient chair and took off his canvas gloves and smoothed them out like the veriest Beau Brummel of the Rialto emanating from the opera. With which process he placed his hands behind his back and stared a long time at the floor and the safe which had been the cause

of the murder, still stroking his beard as if in deep thought. Not a sound had come from him, and the crowd watched this strange monstrosity with silent expectancy.

Now, however, his reverie was broken by the strange operation of lifting up the tail of his tattered raincoat, and there, sewed into it, was a child's school slate which he swung around and on which he commenced marking down vague notes which, evidently, from their speed of inscription, were but senseless scrawlings. This done, he let the tail fall, carrying the slate completely out of sight again, and drawing from a hip pocket of his inside clothes a big burning glass tied to a piece of broom handle, he made a careful examination of the floor beneath him and then the plate attached by its four rivets to the front of the safe, then the rest of the safe door. Nodding his head, as though he had found some infinitesimal scratch familiar to him, he withdrew from his pocket an automobile flash with a powerful reflector, but containing, alas, only a short stub of wax candle stuck in its nose, and lighting this remnant peered more intently at the scratch or microscopic defect that had claimed his attention. He now withdrew from under the flap of his Sherlock Holmesian cap a short stub of chalk, and with it he made a cross on the safe door—a cross whose wobbly and uncertain arms were perhaps two inches each in length.

The whole deductive process, or burlesque or travesty on such, was pitiful to say the least. Mattox, perched on the boxlike eminence that gave him a clear and unimpaired view of all the proceedings, smiled ruefully at the girl who from the front of the same eminence looked solemnly back at him, shaking her head in deprecation of the exhibition. And then as she directed her gaze forward again, he too bent his attention sadly once more to this idiot star of the evening.

That the intense mental concentration of a simpleton had provoked the crowd to facetiousness was evidenced

now by the catcalls that commenced to come from all over this paid audience. "Hooray for Hawkshaw!" one man shouted. Another, up front, called out "Was he coming or going, Sherlocko?" And from the opposite side of the crowd, near the front, came the question: "Was it a little dark woman what lisped, or was it a tall man wit' the left ear lobe missin'?" Some waggish drunk in one corner, with hat awry on head and necktie up over one ear, called out: "I shay, ol' top, how you goin' to sphend zhat shousan' dollar r'ward?" And a fellow with cauliflowered ear but a few feet from Silverthorne, Mattox and their party, called our derisively: "Will yer take a case fer me, Sherlock? Me yaller dorg disappeared wit' two of me neighbor's yaller pups!"

The idiot appeared to be somewhat disconcerted at this reception of his activities. For the first time now he surveyed his audience, and he appeared, as his vacuous yet dubious glance roved over the sea of faces, to half suspect that he was being ridiculed by experts. And as one who might endeavor to divert a tide of adverse criticism, he performed a sudden and unexpected feat of dexterity, remarkable if for no other reason than that it accomplished its purpose. He lay on the top of the safe his burning glass tied to its broomhandle, his auto torchlight with its candle, and, spitting on his hands, he flung himself in a wide arc in the air as does an acrobat who prepares to walk on his hands, and became in a trice completely turned over.

But a most weird transformation had taken place. The raincoat had been crudely painted inside to represent a woman's plaid dress, and had moreover been hooked at his waist. On each of his knees had been affixed a grotesque false face of a woman, with a willow plume attached to his lower limbs and running from knee to foot, and now that the raincoat fell over his own face and shoulders and hands, because of his being inverted, he presented the

peculiar uncanny sight of two demoniacal looking women with grotesquely slim torsos, both joined at the waist, with one skirt, their long nosed goblin-like faces bobbing curiously and terribly as the idiot walked around and around on his hands in a circle.

"That's the lady Siamese-twin disguise," explained the blue-capped police head apologetically from one side of the stage. "It defies the most astute crooks on record, folks. And it can be assumed in a instant!"

At this enlightening information, the crowd went wild. Claps and catcalls and yells broke over the now highly entertained audience as the two faces bobbed around and around the floor exactly like a pair of female Siamese-twins, and then, as suddenly as it had been donned, the disguise was doffed, for the idiot turned a neat cart-wheel to his feet, the raincoat fell back to its proper position, and Hawkshaw himself had returned.

But what a Hawkshaw it was now! For, while draped from public gaze by that raincoat-skirt, the idiot had managed—perhaps in that breathing spell when he had rested his inverted body against the wall presumably to stand on one hand—to strap directly over that very black beard by a rubber band passing around his head, a huge, monstrous flaming red beard, and he might now indeed have been one of the original Teutons of the Black Forest. And again the crowd, entertained by the unexpected, whistled, jeered and called forth remarks.

But now it quieted down with marked suddenness as the idiot, taking from one pocket of the raincoat a mass of evident trash consisting of old calendar pads, bits of canceled checks, colored advertising tickets, strips of lithographs torn off of billboards, which he first counted meticulously off like so many thousand dollar bills, unrolled a huge sheet of white paper perhaps six feet by three on which some extremely unskilled artist in the police station had drawn a grotesque drawing of a knock-

kneed highwayman with black mask, gun in hand, and pot belly indicating possibly the prosperity of such a calling.

The idiot now climbed on a chair at the back of the platform, and by two pins which he magically withdrew from somewhere hung this drawing on the matchboard wooden partition which separated the space from some small back room. The crowd watched in puzzled silence as he removed the chair, and then from some recess inside his inner coat withdrew a short, squat, powerful bow with six arrows bearing shining steel points and feather-tipped ends.

"Sh!" admonished the blue-capped master of ceremonies, advancing to the rope with his finger on his lips. "Simple scorns firearms, folks, because he ain't allowed to have any; but he's going to show you some sharpshooting with the bow and arrow. He's the nemysis of every gangster and gunman in the city."

The crowd chuckled at this ironic conception, but it quieted down a bit in amazement as the idiot, crawling under the rope and pressing back a few feet on the lower level of the old store floor till he was a good twenty feet from his target, called out "Lef' eye," and dispatched an arrow with such celerity into the left eye of the drawing that only the twang of the bowstring and the thud of the arrow was proof it had even sped.

"Knee," he shouted, and an arrow ceased to be in the bow but was sticking from the knee instead.

And calling in turn "Vurhead," "Tummy," and "Voot," and "Heart," he carelessly dispatched with four menacing thuds four arrows into the forehead, stomach, foot and heart of the figure without an error. A natural sharpshooter he obviously was: perhaps he was Robin Hood, the genius of Sherwood Forest, reincarnated.

Now the crowd was markedly puzzled as to how to take him. His prowess had staggered them.

"Show 'em, Simple, how you sing," said the blue-capped

police head, "when you want the baddy crooks not to know you're on their trail."

Simple had climbed back on the stage by this time, and nothing loath to act on the suggestion given him, drew his lungs well full of air, and advancing to the footlights commenced a weird wabbly croon, that wavered and rose through a series of false notes into the melody of some faintly distinguishable popular air, and now the house was brought down. But in a quite insulting manner. Whistles, catcalls, yells, and cries of "get the hook" filled the place from side to side, and back to front. And only when a tall, dignified grey-haired man standing up near the front turned so that he half faced the crowd as he spoke, and half the stage, and moreover commenced to speak, did both the crooning stop and the crowd's baiting as well.

"This is an outrage," the man said in a loud voice. "Chief O'Toole, I represent the Bohemian Society of Chicago. In all seriousness today we offered a reward of $1000 to any person or persons proving that a man did not hold the gun which fired the shot that killed Jech. And I come over here tonight expecting to see some evidences at least of legitimate police activity, and I—" He actually choked in his rage. "—and the police are playing, actually playing; staging a disgraceful show when they should be on the job catching thieves and murderers."

"But Mr. Langwehr," put in the man addressed as O'Toole, while the crowd listened with gusto to this tilt, "if you were here a short while back—and I think I did see you out there—you'd know that the police *are* on the job. I outlined the perfect case we had and how the wires were busy right now. However, I'm sorry to say that you haven't a chance now, sir, of getting that bequest for your society, for later department records on this yellow-headed moll that was in here with this gang last night show that she ain't a gun-moll—that she don't hardly

know the difference between the front and rear end of a gun; and she couldn't have fired that shot that killed your friend, much less have hit him through the heart with one try. That leaves only Gentleman Dan—known as a dead shot—or mebbe Chihuahua Joe. But anyway, both are men and you and your society are out. So we *have* been on the job, Mr. Langwehr. And we've a perfect case."

"Perfect case—yes!" sneered the tall man. "And a lot of good your wonderful case is for the Chicago Bohemian Society." He paused, choleric. "Well, O'Toole, I wasn't going to say a word in public, but now by God sir, I am—seeing the police are staging a disgraceful show like this. I heard your perfect case—all of it. You've postulated nearly everything on that red enclosed date of the coming December—the 17th—on that calendar leaf over yonder; the supposed date of release of Gentleman Dan Kremer from the Massachusetts penitentiary. Well all I want to say, sir, to you, is that December 17th happens to be the date when this man Jech's annual insurance premium falls due in the great $100,000 Tontine instituted over thirty-one years ago by the Czech National Insurance Company of New York City, in which 100 prominent Bohemians started and of which Jech succeeded in surviving all but six. And, sir, there is no day of grace—not an hour of grace—on Tontine policy premiums. For years, sir, as Jech came closer to being the survivor of that great Tontine, I've known him to mark that date on every calendar he had in the place, so that he would not make an error and forfeit his valuable rights. So think that over, O'Toole."

The tall man took occasion now to draw about one good breath and then went forcibly on.

"And this gang, you claim, took the key that hung by a leather thong from Jech's neck and got what they wanted from the safe before they fled. You claim that, don't you?

And just because it wasn't on Jech's neck when you found him, and because it wasn't on that ledge on the inside of his wooden bed-rail that his sister-in-law described to you? Well, it may interest you to know that that thong, Jech told me, was made from thin strips of tanned rat-skin—sewed together, and that his cat was so fascinated by the smell of it that she was always locating it and dislodging it; that she had found this place and that he had had to dig up still a newer hiding place—not against thieves—nor against police—but against the cat! As long as you've brought poor lads with cloudy mentalities into this case, better get a few good cats in on the hunt too. You'll find the key then."

He paused a second, but only as one gathering momentum, and then went on with unrestrained fierceness, the object of his attack only blinking dumbfoundedly over the footlights.

"But this gang, eh? Let's see. You tell us all something about that mirror that was taken down off its nail and stood up on that radiator." He pointed at it. "So that indicates a four-foot ten girl, does it? Corntossel Annie? Well, sir, if there are any collectors in this crowd they'll corroborate me when I say that's a Florentine mirror, and when I was here yesterday morning to see Jech about converting his tontine insurance with the other six surviving members—for, sir, I happen also to be a director in the Czech National Insurance Company—I dickered with him about that mirror. It was I who took it down, O'Toole, and I took it down in order to examine the hammered brass frame, and it was I who left it on that radiator, and if you found a thumbprint on it with a scar running across it, that thumbprint and that scar, sir, are mine. And I don't care who knows it." He paused a bare second. "Your pockmarked gypsy woman across the street—Chihuahua Joe Gonzalez in disguise? Well, sir, when I left Jech's yesterday morning, and crossed the

street to go East, that gypsy woman was suckling a baby over there. If Chihuahua Joe Gonzalez can suckle a baby, O'Toole, he's a better man than you or I. And all I've got to say to you is: you'd better get after those two nigger crackswomen." He stopped. He had fired a surprising broadside indeed.

As for the crowd, it went wild. It clapped and whistled. It was only an audience, and this clash of human interests was a better show by far than that put on by the idiot, who now stood gaping at the whole controversy with his finger in his mouth, exactly like a five-year old.

The man O'Toole was furious at this public assault—his face was red as a beet—and he swallowed with difficulty like one who dimly perceived the most beautiful castles tumbling about his feet. "Yeah, yeah, yeah," he sneered, with a half stammer, "I know—yeah I know—that you'd like to see the boys pin the crime on them two nigger women, because your damned old Hunky society gets 30,000 berries if it's proven that a man didn't fire that shot. Well, if you're hoping anything from that, big boy, forget it and go home and wipe your nose, because them two nigger women was picked up in Hammond, Indiana today, and they got a perfect alibi for last night—the night of the murder. They was both in the Whiting, Indiana, jail on drunkenness all last night, mugged an' recognized."

Now it was the police chief's inning, and the grey-haired man appeared crestfallen, staggered, smashed. It was plain that he had pinned a lot on his own hypothesis. His face took on a sickly hue, but he rallied with dignity. "Then," he said bitterly, "the Chicago Bohemian Society, which for years has looked out like a mother for every Bohemian orphan and sick Bohemian woman in this city of Chicago, a society which spends every dollar of its funds for actual charity work and not a penny for salaries, loses $30,000 it should have if there's any justice in this world. Well, that's life—but that ends the matter, and I bid you all

good evening." He turned proudly in his tracks as one intending to thread his way out by force through a mass of human riff-raff.

The idiot boy, finger still in mouth, had been listening meekly to all this conflict precipitated by no other person than himself. Overawed, obviously, it yet appeared that something had filtered into his brain.

"'Ooman's not fire shot," he jabbered.

The chief turned on him like a tornado. "Keep your trap shut, you! What th' hell do you know about it, you confounded sixteenth-wit fool?"

"Simple know all about it," said the idiot boy. With a wide far-flung gesture he ripped off both the white cotton mustache, the red beard and the black beard beneath that. "I—I—I am Hawkshaw the Detekative!"

A roar went up from the crowd, but it was silenced almost on the heels of its inception by the sudden determination that seemed to gleam forth in the vacuous face of the idiot. The latter beckoned to the plain-clothes man who had sat silently all the while in the straight-backed chair at the rear of the platform, and while the chief regarded him savagely under beetling eyebrows, he led the detective over to the front of the safe.

"Look. Do—do like Simple," he directed. He rocked his body from side to side, throwing his weight first on one foot, then on the other foot which stood, as a matter of exactness, on the floor in front of the safe.

"Do—do it!" he screamed.

The plain-clothes man, markedly overawed by this display of ferocity, and evidently feeling he ought to help along the show which had been partly spoiled by unexpected interruptions, proceeded to rock himself thus. But now all were watching the idiot.

He had taken from his pocket the bunch of trash and old calendar pads which he had first abstracted in order to obtain the crude drawing which he had used as his arch-

ery target. It was beyond all doubt a collection of many ages and times. He pointed to the calendar on the wall.

"Look—'at ain' nex' Dezember, ziz year. Zat's—" He held up a calendar pad which, unlike the leaf on the wall, appeared to have the figures of the current year 1931 plainly and boldly printed on each of the leaves themselves. He turned it back rapidly to the last leaf, which had holly-berries printed gaily around it, and striding across the floor held it alongside the leaf on Jech's calendar. "Jich's not nex' Dezember. Diff'rent. Not zame." He now withdrew several more calendars from his pack and taking one forth, and turning back its leaves like the first, held it up as he had the other. It bore the figures 1929. It matched exactly the leaf on Jech's wall, the columns of dates on each scrupulously paralleling each other. It was plain that the brilliant lights of the detective world had merely been assuming all along that it was the coming December. Which would have been a reasonable, though supine, assumption, except that—

The crowd, literally as one human being, seemed to wrinkle its collective brow at something—a very insignificant thing to be sure, but—And the idiot crystallized the "but" into a somewhat definite generalization, when he added naively: "An' Ingleman not fly Chinaland when Simple in baby-man school way—way—long time back—ni-teen twenny-ni'." He pointed childlike at the aviator swooping down into the city of pagodas.

At this remark, a big laborer up front, in overalls and with pipe unlighted in mouth, spoke, as though overcome by the force of his own logic.

"The idjit's tootin' right. Th' Britisher just flew th' Pacific this past June. Why—in 1929 when that leaf was printed there wasn't no long distance Pacific hop records made 'cept the Australy fliers who took three jumps to git to Australy. That ain't no calendar."

Which seemed but too true. The silence proclaimed that

the crowd was digesting the fact that Mr. Jech had been maintaining on his wall a wholly artificial calendar composed of a peculiar lithograph of current significance, to which was merely affixed by a strip of paste along its top an old pad or rather leaf of something two years back. If so, why? But the khaki-clad officer near the calendar seemed activated at this point to perform a simple but efficacious move to answer part of these questions. He reached over automatically and pulled the leaf directly off.

Now things became considerably clearer. Underneath where the leaf had been was a simple boxed advertising announcement in Gothic letters on a white background, which to those in front who possessed normally keen vision read:

> THE INTERNATIONAL CURIO COMPANY OF NEW YORK CITY ANNOUNCES IT HAS BOUGHT THE GREATEST CURIO WHICH WILL EVER BE KNOWN TO FUTURE GENERATIONS—MR. HUBERT TIPTON-COUCH'S TRANS-PACIFIC PLANE, THE FIRST PLANE TO SPAN THE PACIFIC OCEAN IN ONE JUMP. IT WILL BE DISMANTLED INTO THREE THOUSAND PARTS FOR DISTRIBUTION TO THE TRADE. HAVE YOU PLACED YOUR ORDER?

Thus was the ownership by Jech, curio dealer, of this curious lithograph explained, but a further mystery was unfolded which explained, forsooth, the existence of the calendar leaf neatly affixed thereto, but not itself: a torn gap in the boxed typed announcement due, probably, to the lithograph's adhering originally to the cardboard roller in which it had arrived by mail, did not show beneath it, very strangely, the white wall on which the lithograph hung. Instead a darkness, as of a cavern, seemed to lie back of the spot.

But it was the idiot who perhaps made the most direct shortcut to direct results, which he did simply by stepping to the wall, and lifting the entire improvised calendar down from the tack on which it hung by its loop of string.

A silence that was that of a great forest filled the room. One could have heard a pin roll back and forth.

For back of where the lithograph had hung, Jech had chiseled a large, roomy and deep recess in the wall, at the exact point where a metal I-beam, running vertically, and forming part of the structure of the building, together with an iron conduit carrying lighting wires, would be exposed. To the flange of this I-beam he had screwed firmly a small carpenter's vise, and held tightly in the jaws of this vise, pointing it seemed, toward the floor in front of the safe, was a blue-steel revolver on whose handle was visible a bright green sticker such as pawnbrokers use to denote the number of a pledge. That the idiot had already explored this recess in the past was indicated indisputably by the cross he had chalked on the door of the safe just a few minutes before at some minute mark; for a small round piece of mirror glued to the front sight of the revolver caught the lights pouring from the bulbs in the ceiling of the office, and cast a pale spot of illumination right at the intersection of the cross' arms. And by this bit of mirror reflecting a light on the front part of that iron box, had the devilish aim of the thing been accomplished.

But this was not all, by any means. A huge solenoid, or electro-magnet, of green insulated wire affixed in that recess, held an apparently movable or sliding metal core to which was fixed a short length of flexible steel wire attached to the trigger of the gun—not the hammer, for that was already snapped down on its cylinder—and as the plain-clothes man whom Simple had set to rocking back and forth on the loose boarding in front of the safe stupidly continued this mechanical procedure, the metal core sucked back and forth in the cylinder of green wire with powerful strokes, at each in-stroke straining and tugging on the wire attached to the trigger.

A burglar trap! A demoniacal burglar trap, sprung by electrical contacts beneath the floor under the safe, a trap

energized by the electric current taken directly from the iron conduit and which could be set nightly by means of a slender copper single-throw switch which, mounted at the side of the recess, lay quite closed, showing that the circuit had been closed the night of Jech's death. And that the single deadly missile intended to wing its way from this orifice had done so in this case, and had moreover gone directly through the concealing color-print, was evident as the uniformed policeman near Simple took from his outstretched hand the lithograph and holding it up peered at it and through it toward one of the bright electric bulbs hanging on the rope. To the crowd on the other side of that rope was now visible for the first time a small round hole through which the lights on the ceiling gleamed —a small circular orifice which lay directly in the deep blacks of the lithograph and whose own blackness therefore had merged with the jet pigment in which fate had placed it; and as the policeman turned the lithograph around to examine for himself that side which the crowd had just been able to view, to the latter was exposed the inside of the lithograph—and the ring of deep brown color burned about the orifice by the discharge of the revolver.

It was now that the plain-clothes man who had been rocking back and forth came suddenly to a stop; stepping to the open orifice he peered in at it with his flashlight, illuminating the exposed gun and the very interior of its muzzle. He looked back toward the man O'Toole. "Been fired," he said laconically. And with no further comment he reached over to the improvised speaker's table which carried on it several tapers of wax. Inserting one gently, he endeavored to turn it—but it seemed unwilling to go in. Whereupon he turned it in the opposite direction. It went smoothly in, a half inch with each turn. He unscrewed it gently and carefully and holding it in the light, nodded his head. Looking up, he directed his words again to the man O'Toole. "Reversely rifled, Chief. Yep. One o' Sammy

Sonnenschein's five reversely rifled .38's. And carries a pawnshop sticker, Chief—Solomon Stein—522 South Clark Street." His voice was mournful.

Not so was that of the big man who had had the acerbic verbal tilt with the police head and who had paused where he was in the act of departing the place. He withdrew from his pocket a crisp strip of salmon-colored paper and waved it aloft. His cry was an exultant one.

"Thank God, the Bohemian Society of Chicago wins its $30,000 bequest. No living hand held the gun that killed poor Jech—no hand of man or woman! And this reward—" He held aloft again the salmon-colored strip of paper, and he choked cholerically as he spoke. "This reward—not only, sir, is that poor boy going to get a job in my wholesale crockery store on Milwaukee Avenue, for if he *is* an idiot he can do a day's work for me for wages instead of two men's work for you for nothing—this reward goes to him. Yes, sir, O'Toole, it goes to him, for he's uncovered this thing where you asinine police and would-be detectives had skulls an inch thick. I'll deposit this certified check myself, in his name, for one thousand dollars, and you crooked and addlepated numbskulls will never get a smell of it. Put a red circle around that, O'Toole!"

A flashlight boomed suddenly—two flashlights—the newspaper world had abruptly come to life. A roly-poly reporter near the raised boxlike structure on which Mattox and his party were ensconced, writhed like a huge eel through the crowd near them and glued himself with a ferocious grasp to the extended transmitter-arm of a wall phone. It would have taken a regiment to dislodge him. He evidently dialed it with one swing to "Emergency" for he was calling Main 4000 excitedly, and in less than a second was talking to his party. His low words were audible to all those around him.

"Bailey talkin', Chief. Yeah, Bailey. Send all the photographers you got—what?—Gentleman Dan Kremer

pinched in mid-ocean on the Majestic with the Joseph and Mary vestal lamp in the false bottom of his luggage?—the hell you say, Chief?—but lissen, I—what?—Oliver Oliver recovers the loot of that missing Chink cashier?—two hundred thou?—Wowie!—then save the right half of that layout I had made, for your Oliver story, and play him up to the skies—good stuff!—but lissen, Chief—yeah, yeah, good stuff—fine stuff—but you ain't seen nothing, Chief, you ain't heard nothing—biggest burlesque story you ever heard of against the police department and detective bureau just busted here at the Jech shop tonight. Yeah—the idiot!—he solved the case. Yeah, honest to God, Chief! No kidding. Yeah, yeah, photographers—we'll want pictures, pictures—Jeez' yes, Chief, all the pictures we can get, idiot, safe 'n everything. Biggest burlesque of the day. What? Afraid to run it? Account the 22nd Street station? Hell no, Chief, there won't be any 22nd Street station when the Commissioner unfolds his paper tomorrow morning. Not a man'll be left. Hurry 'em, Chief. Hurry 'em—front page stuff—"

But Mattox heard no more, for Silverthorne had tapped him on the arm. The latter's words instead were now impinging on his eardrums. "Let's be going," the older man said. "They'll be taking the crowd any minute—interviewing everybody—let's get out quick." And tapping Vance and Iolanthe on the arms, they tore their way through the mob a short distance to the street door, and out to the curb, where Silverthorne flagged a taxicab which was rolling slowly by, its driver craning his neck in at the excitement.

Off they rolled. Behind them sounded loud talking, accusations, counter-charges, derisive laughter—and the booming of another flashlight. And as they lurched sharply around the corner and left the whole thing in their rear Vance spoke—the only one.

"Gad, folks, it's all clear as crystal, isn't it? The old

boy came down in the night, kicked open his own window, and commenced to lay the earmarks of a safe robbery—that is, the kind of a safe robbery that he wouldn't be supposed to hear, see or feel. But he forgot to throw off the switch on his own burglar trap. And he was shot down and fell dead trying to get to the street. Everything's clear now—except one question: and I'll bet they never will solve it to their satisfaction. Did any of you hear that red-haired reporter near me—yes, he had a camera slung over his shoulder—say to somebody with him that he'd bet Jech had something in the safe he'd sold to some collector and had been paid for, and that he was turning around and selling it all over again to somebody else? Golly, that's a mystery—that part."

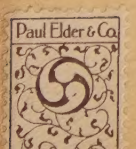
"No—no mystery at all, I guess," murmured Horatio Silverthorne. And he said no more.

As for Mattox, he too said nothing. Jech's motive was clear to two persons in the universe—and always would be. Those two persons were himself and Silverthorne. That was enough. Indeed, to them the entire thing was now clear as day. As for the Vindelinus, it belonged to Silverthorne; the latter had discovered its existence first. He had the moral right of prior discovery. The old millionaire on Lake Shore Drive had not yet paid a penny for it. And Silverthorne had parted with six thousand precious dollars for it. And to break the tension, Mattox withdrew from his pocket a creamy leaf of thick paper covered with quaintly formed Chinese characters. The cab was just rolling onto brilliantly lighted Michigan Avenue, and its interior was now bright as day.

"Mr. Silverthorne," he said, "here is something that belongs with something you have. And unfortunately the whole thing belongs to one, Wah Hung Fung of Chicago." He turned to the others. "But before it leaves my possession I'd like to translate for you all the few words of wisdom it contains. It says: 'And I say to you that the

workings of Fate are as the web of a spider, and you shall plunge headlong into those same pits which you dig for others.' "

And he added quietly as he slipped an arm tenderly about the slim girl at his side: "The man who spoke thus was Tu Fu, the Wise. And thus, even as Tu Fu decreed, died Casimer Jech of East 22nd Street, Chicago!"

THE END

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